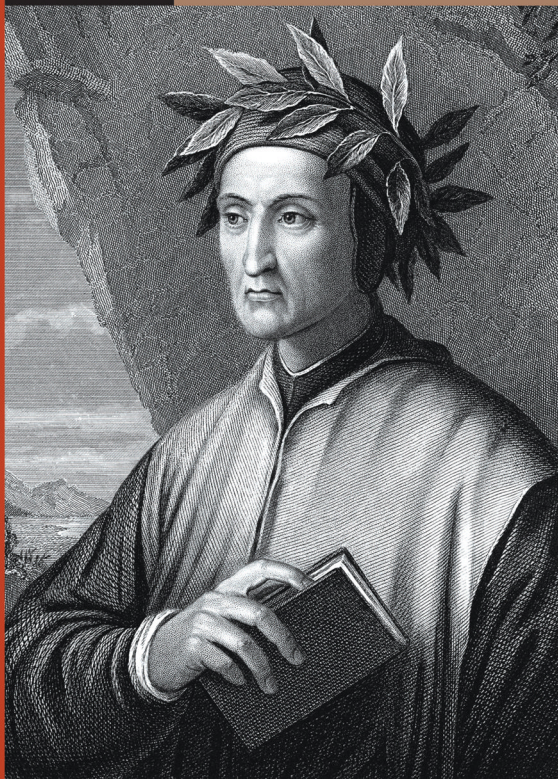


BLOOM'S
MODERN
CRITICAL
VIEWS

NEW EDITION

DANTE ALIGHIERI

Edited and with an Introduction by
HAROLD BLOOM



Bloom's Modern Critical Views

African-American Poets: Volume 1	Gwendolyn Brooks	Octavio Paz
African-American Poets: Volume 2	Hans Christian Andersen	Oscar Wilde
Aldous Huxley	Henry David Thoreau	Paul Auster
Alfred, Lord Tennyson	Herman Melville	Philip Roth
Alice Munro	Hermann Hesse	Ralph Ellison
Alice Walker	H.G. Wells	Ralph Waldo Emerson
American Women Poets: 1650–1950	Hispanic-American Writers	Ray Bradbury
Amy Tan	Homer	Richard Wright
Anton Chekhov	Honoré de Balzac	Robert Browning
Arthur Miller	Jamaica Kincaid	Robert Frost
Asian-American Writers	James Joyce	Robert Hayden
August Wilson	Jane Austen	Robert Louis Stevenson
The Bible	Jay Wright	The Romantic Poets
The Brontës	J.D. Salinger	Salman Rushdie
Carson McCullers	Jean-Paul Sartre	Samuel Beckett
Charles Dickens	John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets	Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Christopher Marlowe	John Irving	Stephen Crane
Contemporary Poets	John Keats	Stephen King
Cormac McCarthy	John Milton	Sylvia Plath
C.S. Lewis	John Steinbeck	Tennessee Williams
Dante Alighieri	José Saramago	Thomas Hardy
David Mamet	Joseph Conrad	Thomas Pynchon
Derek Walcott	J.R.R. Tolkien	Tom Wolfe
Don DeLillo	Julio Cortázar	Toni Morrison
Doris Lessing	Kate Chopin	Tony Kushner
Edgar Allan Poe	Kurt Vonnegut	Truman Capote
Émile Zola	Langston Hughes	Walt Whitman
Emily Dickinson	Leo Tolstoy	W.E.B. Du Bois
Ernest Hemingway	Marcel Proust	William Blake
Eudora Welty	Margaret Atwood	William Faulkner
Eugene O'Neill	Mark Twain	William Gaddis
F. Scott Fitzgerald	Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley	William Shakespeare: Comedies
Flannery O'Connor	Maya Angelou	William Shakespeare: Histories
Franz Kafka	Miguel de Cervantes	William Shakespeare: Romances
Gabriel García Márquez	Milan Kundera	William Shakespeare: Tragedies
Geoffrey Chaucer	Nathaniel Hawthorne	William Wordsworth
George Orwell	Native American Writers	Zora Neale Hurston
G.K. Chesterton	Norman Mailer	

Bloom's Modern Critical Views

DANTE ALIGHIERI

New Edition

Edited and with an introduction by

Harold Bloom

Sterling Professor of the Humanities

Yale University

Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Dante Alighieri—New Edition

Copyright © 2011 by Infobase Publishing

Introduction © 2011 by Harold Bloom

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher. For more information contact:

Bloom's Literary Criticism
An imprint of Infobase Publishing
132 West 31st Street
New York NY 10001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dante Alighieri / edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom. — New ed.

p. cm. — (Bloom's modern critical views)

English and Italian.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-60413-880-1

1. Dante Alighieri, 1265–1321.—Criticism and interpretation. I. Bloom, Harold.

PQ4335.D283 2010

851'.1—dc22

2010021315

Bloom's Literary Criticism books are available at special discounts when purchased in bulk quantities for businesses, associations, institutions, or sales promotions. Please call our Special Sales Department in New York at (212) 967-8800 or (800) 322-8755.

You can find Bloom's Literary Criticism on the World Wide Web at
<http://www.chelseahouse.com>

Contributing editor: Pamela Loos
Cover designed by Takeshi Takahashi
Composition by IBT Global, Troy NY
Cover printed by IBT Global, Troy NY
Book printed and bound by IBT Global, Troy NY
Date printed: November 2010
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

All links and Web addresses were checked and verified to be correct at the time of publication. Because of the dynamic nature of the Web, some addresses and links may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

Contents

Editor's Note	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Harold Bloom</i>	
Purgatory as Paradigm: Traveling the New and Never-Before-Traveled Path of This Life/Poem	21
<i>Teodolinda Barolini</i>	
Part I: The Order of the <i>Paradiso</i>	53
<i>Marc Cogan</i>	
Dante's Beatrice and the New Life of Poetry	83
<i>R.W.B. Lewis</i>	
The Destination: Dante's Eyes Fixed and Attentive	97
<i>Lloyd Howard</i>	
Does the <i>Stilnovo</i> Go to Heaven?	123
<i>Lino Pertile</i>	
The Heaven of the Sun: Dante Between Aquinas and Bonaventure	133
<i>Giuseppe Mazzotta</i>	

Dante's Other World: Moral Order	149
<i>John A. Scott</i>	
The Classical Context of the Ulysses Canto	177
<i>Michelangelo Picone</i>	
Modes of Metamorphosis in the <i>Comedia</i> :	
The Case of <i>Infèrno</i> XIII	197
<i>Lynne Press</i>	
Chronology	217
Contributors	219
Bibliography	221
Acknowledgments	225
Index	227

Editor's Note

My introductory essay takes serious issue with the overtheologizers of Dante: T.S. Eliot, Erich Auerbach, Charles Singleton. Instead I follow E.R. Curtius in emphasizing Dante's spiritual originality and also pay tribute to John Freccer for his celebration of the poet as agonist.

Detheologizing Dante, Teodolinda Barolini notes Dante's rugged transgressiveness, after which Marc Cogan outlines the imaginative order of the Paradiso.

My late friend R.W.B. Lewis acutely analyzes the *Vita Nuova*, while Lloyd Howard centers on Casella's song in the *Purgatorio*.

Seeking the representation of "exemplary love" in the *Commedia*, Lino Pertile locates it outside the poem, if anywhere: "there is no room for earthly love in Paradise."

In a brilliant essay, Giuseppe Mazzotta shows Dante surpassing the greatest of theologians and, by his poetry, opening up new vistas for theology. Dante, like Shakespeare, has rethought everything for himself. John A. Scott then explores Dante's delayed moral revelations.

The famous Ulysses canto of the *Inferno* is refigured by Michelangelo Picone, after which Lynne Press concludes this volume with a consideration of *Inferno* XIII, where Virgil and other precursors are transmuted into Dante's own terrifying originality.

HAROLD BLOOM

Introduction

THE life of Dante Alighieri itself can seem a turbulent poem, closer to his *Inferno* than to his *Purgatorio*, quite aside from his *Paradiso*. Biographies so far are mostly inadequate to Dante's genius, with the major exception of the very first, Giovanni Boccaccio's, aptly described by Giuseppe Mazzotta as a "self-conscious fictional work akin to Dante's own *Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*) which responds imaginatively to Dante's steady self-dramatization in his works." This need not surprise anyone; Dante, like Shakespeare, is so large a form of thought and imagination that individual biographers, scholars, and critics tend to see only aspects of an extraordinary panoply. I always recommend to my students, in preference to all biographies of Shakespeare, the late Anthony Burgess's *Nothing Like the Sun*, a rather Joycean novel narrated by Shakespeare in the first person.

The exalted Dante regarded himself as a prophet, at least the equal of Isaiah or Jeremiah. Shakespeare, we can assume, had no such self-estimate; the creator of Hamlet, Falstaff, and Lear has much in common with Geoffrey Chaucer, the maker of the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath, and Chaucer subtly mocks Dante. One has to be of Chaucer's eminence, if Dante is to be treated ironically, and even Chaucer clearly admires far more intensely than he dissents.

One cannot discuss genius in all the world's history without centering on Dante, since only Shakespeare, of all geniuses of language, is richer. Shakespeare to a considerable extent remade English: about 1,800 words of the 21,000 he employed were his own coinage, and I cannot pick up a newspaper without finding Shakespearean turns of phrase scattered through it, frequently with-

out intention. Yet Shakespeare's English was inherited by him, from Chaucer and from William Tyndale, the principal translator of the Protestant Bible. Had Shakespeare written nothing, the English language, pretty much as we know it, would have prevailed, but Dante's Tuscan dialect became the Italian language largely because of Dante. He is the national poet, as Shakespeare is wherever English is spoken, and Goethe wherever German dominates. No single French poet, not even Racine or Victor Hugo, is so unchallenged in eminence, and no Spanish-language poet is so central as Cervantes. And yet Dante, though he essentially founded literary Italian, hardly thought of himself as Tuscan, let alone Italian. He was a Florentine, obsessively so, exiled from his city in the last 19 of his 56 years.

A few dates are crucial for the reader of Dante, starting with the death of Beatrice, his beloved ideal or idealized beloved, on June 8, 1290, when the poet was 25. By his own account, Dante's devotion to Beatrice was what we call platonic, though nothing concerning Dante ever can be termed anything but Dantesque, including his Catholicism. He set Easter 1300 as the fictive date of the journey he undertakes in *The Divine Comedy*, and he completed the *Inferno*, its first and most notorious part, in 1314. In the seven years remaining to him, he had the sublime fortune of composing both the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*, so that his magnificent poem was fully composed by almost a year before his death.

Shakespeare died as he turned 52, but we lost nothing by it, because he had stopped writing some three years before. Dante, one feels, would have gone on to other literary achievements, had he lived the quarter-century more that he expected in order to reach the "perfect" age of 81, nine nines in a numerological vision of his own, which cannot altogether be deciphered.

Here is Dante in the *Convivio* (book 4, 24) telling us that age ends at the seventieth year, but that there can be sublimity, if we live on:

Whence we have it of Plato—whom (both in the strength of his own nature, and because of the physiognomistope which Socrates cast for him when first he saw him) we may believe to have had the most excellent nature—that he lives eighty-one years, as testifies Tully in that *Of Old Age*. And I believe that if Christ had not been crucified and had lived out the space which his life had power to cover according to its nature, he would have been changed at the eighty-first year from mortal body to eternal.

What change did Dante expect at the eighty-first year? Would Beatrice, the Lady Nine, have appeared to him again, in this life? George Santayana

found in Beatrice a Platonizing of Christianity; E. R. Curtius saw her as the center of Dante's personal and poetic gnosis. She has some crucial relation to the transfiguration that Christ would have undergone at 81, since her own death, according to her lover's *Vita Nuova*, is dated by him through a process in which the perfect number nine is completed nine times. At 25, she changed from mortal to eternal body. Dante, implicitly and explicitly, tells us throughout the *Commedia* that he, Dante, is the truth. The Sufi martyr Hallaj died for proclaiming that he was the truth, though in American religion (in its various forms) such an affirmation is almost commonplace. I talk to dissident Mormons, Baptist sectaries, and many Pentecostals who candidly assure me that they are the truth. Neither Augustine nor Aquinas would have said that he was the truth. The *Commedia* would not work if Beatrice were not the truth, and yet, without Dante, none of us would have heard of Beatrice. I think that too much cannot be made of this, and I never quite understand why Dante, who now defines Catholicism for so many intellectuals, overcame the possibility that his personal myth of Beatrice was as much a heresy as the Gnostic myths of a Sophia, or female principle, in the Godhead. Simon Magus found his Helena in a whorehouse in Tyre and proclaimed her to be both Helen of Troy and the fallen Sophia, or Wisdom of God. The Samaritan Simon, always denounced by Christians, was the first Faustus, audacious and imaginative, but now is universally regarded as a charlatan. Dante found his unfallen Wisdom of God in a Florentine young woman and raised her to the heavenly hierarchy. Simon the magician, like Jesus the magician, belongs to oral tradition, while Dante—except for Shakespeare—is the supreme poet of all Western history and culture. And yet Dante was not less arbitrary than Simon, as we ought not to forget. Though he says otherwise, Dante usurps poetic authority and establishes himself as central to Western culture.

How different Dante's centrality is from Shakespeare's! Dante imposes his personality on us; Shakespeare, even in the sonnets, evades us, because of his uncanny detachment. In the *Vita Nuova*, Dante immerses us in the story of his extraordinary love for a young woman whom he scarcely knew. They first meet as nine-year-olds, though that "nine" is a warning against any literalization of this story. Nine years after the poet first saw Beatrice, she spoke to him, a formal greeting in the street. Another greeting or two, a snub after he poetically professed love for another lady as a "screen" defense, and one gathering where Beatrice may have joined in a gentle mockery of her smitten admirer: This seems to have been their entire relationship. The best commentary on this mere actuality is that of the Argentine fabulist Jorge Luis Borges, who speaks of "our certainty of an unhappy and superstitious love," unreciprocated by Beatrice.

We can speak of Shakespeare's "unhappy and superstitious love" for the fair young nobleman of the sonnets, but some other phrase would have to be found for Shakespeare's descent into the hell of the Dark Lady of the same sequence. To call Dante's love for Beatrice neoplatonic would be insufficient, but how can we define that love? A passion for one's own genius, for a muse of one's own creation, could seem a dark idolatry of self in almost anyone else, but not in the central man. The myth or figure of Beatrice is fused with Dante's lifework; in a crucial sense she is the *Commedia* and cannot be understood if you stand outside the poem. And yet Dante presents her as the truth, though not to be mistaken for the Christ, who is the way, the truth, the light.

Dante scholarship, vastly useful for mastering the complexities of the *Commedia*, nevertheless does not much help me in apprehending Beatrice. She is more Christological in the *Vita Nuova* than in the *Commedia*, though sometimes there she reminds me of what the Gnostics called "the Angel Christ," since she breaks down the distinction between the human and the angelic. A fusion between the divine and the mortal may or may not be heretical, depending on how it is presented. Dante's vision does not impress me as Augustinian or Thomistic, but though hermetic, it is not hermetist, as it were. Rather than identifying with theology, Dante strives to identify it with himself. The presence of the human in the divine is not the same as God's presence in a person and in Beatrice, in particular.

That sounds perhaps odd, since Dante was not William Blake, who urged us to worship only what he called the Human Form Divine. Yet Dante early on wrote that Beatrice was a miracle. This miracle was for all Florence and not for Dante alone, though he was its sole celebrant. His best friend and poetic mentor, Guido Cavalcanti, is later condemned by Dante for not joining the celebration, but Dante has the same relation to Cavalcanti that the young Shakespeare had to Christopher Marlowe, a shadow of influence anxiety. Are we to believe Dante when he implies that Cavalcanti would have been saved if he had acknowledged Beatrice? Is a shared originality still original?

As readers, we can abandon Dante's supposed theology to his exegetes, but you cannot read Dante without coming to terms with his Beatrice. For Dante, she is certainly an Incarnation, which he declines to see as a being in competition with the Incarnation. She is, he insists, whatever happiness he has had, and without her he would not have found his way to salvation. But Dante is not a Faust, to be damned or saved, or a Hamlet, who dies of the truth. Dante is bent on triumph, total vindication, a prophecy fulfilled. His "fathers," Brunetto Latini and Virgil, are transcended with love but still firmly set aside. His poetic "brothers" are acknowledged (rather darkly, in Cavalcanti's case) but are not his companions on the way. Does he persuade us, in the

Commedia, that Beatrice is something more than his individual genius? He is both inside and outside his poem, as Beatrice was in the *Vita Nuova*. Has she a reality that might enable her to be invoked by others?

Shakespeare's grandest characters can walk out of their plays and live in our consciousness of them. Can Beatrice? Dante's personality is so large that it allows room for no one else; the Pilgrim of Eternity takes up all the space. This is hardly a poetic fault, as it would be in any other poet whatsoever. In Dante it is poetic strength, energized by absolute originality, a newness that cannot be staled by endless rereadings and that cannot be assimilated to its sources, literary or theological.

Augustine, opposing the great neoplatonists Plotinus and Porphyry, insisted that self-confidence and pride were not sufficient for the ascent to God. Guidance and assistance were necessary and could come only from God. Is there a fiercer pride or a more resolute self-confidence than Dante's? He portrays himself as a pilgrim, reliant on guidance, comfort, and assistance, but as a poet he is more a prophet being called than he is a Christian undergoing conversion. Does he bother truly to persuade us of his humility? His heroism—spiritual, metaphysical, imaginative—makes Dante the poet pragmatically as much a miracle as was his Beatrice.

Fortunately, he presents himself as a personality, not as a miracle. We know him so well, in essence rather than in outline, that we can accept his hard-won changes as he develops throughout the *Commedia*. Indeed, only he can change in the *Commedia*, as everyone else has reached finality, though there is a process of refining that dwellers in the *Purgatorio* must undergo. Outrageously vivid as everyone is in the *Commedia*, they are past altering, in kind. They will not change because of what Dante has them say or do. This makes total revelation possible: Dante gives us the last word on them, beyond dispute, and always provoking wonder. Whether you can have personality after a last judgment has been passed on you is a very pretty question.

Beatrice, as Dante's creation, possesses little enough personality, because she clearly has had an angelic preexistence before her birth in Florence. Dante shows us, in the *Vita Nuova*, only that she is of unearthly beauty and is capable of severity, a stance toward him that augments in the *Commedia*, though it is merely rhetorical. There is rather a leap from her relative unawareness of her idealizing lover, in life, and her cosmological concern for his salvation after her death. So clearly is she Dante's good genius or better angel that the transmutation is easily acceptable. Laertes rather wistfully says that the rejected Ophelia will be a ministering angel after her death, presumably one of those flights of angels that Horatio invokes at the close, to one's surprise, when we brood about it. Dante, long preparing his own apotheosis, has had his Beatrice in training for quite some time.

No other writer ever is nearly as formidable as Dante, not even John Milton or Leo Tolstoy. Shakespeare, a miracle of elusiveness, is everyone and no one, as Borges said. Dante is Dante. No one is going to explain Dante away by historicizing him or by emulating his own audacious self-theologizing: Cavalcanti, had he lived, would doubtless have written even more powerful lyrics than earlier, but he is not likely to have composed a Third Testament which is precisely what *The Divine Comedy* appears to be. The question of Shakespeare's genius is forever beyond us, yet Dante's genius is an answer not a question. With the exception of Shakespeare, who came three centuries later, the strongest poet of the Western world completed its single greatest work of literary art by the close of the second decade of the fourteenth century. To equal the *Commedia*, and in some ways surpass it, you would have to regard the two dozen most remarkable of Shakespeare's 39 plays as somehow a single entity. But Dante and Shakespeare are very difficult to take in sequence: Try to read *King Lear* after the *Purgatorio*, or *Macbeth* after the *Inferno*, a curious disturbance is felt. These two most central of poets are violently incompatible, at least in my experience. Dante would have wanted his reader to judge that Beatrice was Christ in Dante's soul; many of us may be uncomfortable with that, for various reasons, but how startled we would be if Shakespeare, in the sonnets, were to intimate that the fair young lord (Southampton or whomever) was a type of Christ for the poet who would go on to compose *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

To the common reader who can absorb the *Commedia* in the original, Beatrice is scarcely a puzzle, since Italian critics are very unlike Anglo-American scholars in their approach to Dante, and their more worldly sense of him has filtered down. I treasure the observation of Giambattista Vico that even Homer would have yielded to Dante had the Tuscan been less erudite in theology. Dante, like Freud (and the mystics), thought that erotic sublimation was possible, differing in this from his friend Cavalcanti, who regarded love as an illness that had to be lived through. Dante, who has Francesca and her Paolo down in hell for adultery, was widely noted for his venery, in regard to women very different (in his view) from the sacred Beatrice. About the only place where Dante and Shakespeare meet is in their mutual supremacy at rendering erotic suffering, of others and their own:

Yet shall the streams turn back and climb the hills
 Before Love's flame in this damp wood and green
 Burns, as it burns within a youthful lady,
 For my sake, who would sleep away in stone
 My life, or feed like beasts upon the grass,
 Only to see her garments cast a shade.

That is from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's version of the "stony" sestina "To the Dim Light," one of the "stony rhymes" passionately addressed by Dante to one Pietra. Beatrice is not very Shakespearean; Pietra is, and would have done well as the Dark Lady of the Sonnets:

Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and, till action, lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight . . .

Pious reactions to Dante are not so clearly useless as attempts to Christianize the tragedies of Hamlet and of Lear, but they do the *Commedia* more harm than feminist resentment, which tends to mistrust the idealization of Beatrice. Dante's praise of Beatrice is immensely poignant; his exaltation of an unrequited love is more problematic, unless we think back to the profound visions of early childhood, when we fell in love with someone we scarcely knew and perhaps never saw again. T.S. Eliot shrewdly surmised that Dante's experience of first loving Beatrice must have come before he was nine, and the numerological paradigm indeed could have induced Dante to set the experience two or three years later than it took place. Not being Dante, most of us can do little with so early an epiphany, and part of Dante's achievement is that he could found greatness on it.

If Beatrice is universal in her origins, she becomes in the *Commedia* an esoteric figure, the center of Dante's own gnosis, since it is by and through her that Dante asserts knowledge rather less traditional than most of his exegetes will grant. The permanent notoriety of the *Inferno* has not obscured the dramatic eloquence of the *Purgatorio*, which retains a reasonably wide leadership. It is the *Paradiso* that is immensely difficult, and yet that difficulty represents Dante's genius at its most indisputable, breaking beyond the limits of imaginative literature. There is nothing else that resembles the *Paradiso*, unless it be certain sequences in the *Meccan Revelations* of the Andalusian Sufi Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), who had encountered *his* Beatrice in Mecca. Nizam, the Sophia of Mecca, like Beatrice of Florence, was the center of a theophany and converted Ibn Arabi to an idealized, sublimated love.

At my current age, I am perhaps not yet ready for the *Paradiso* (where, being of the Jewish persuasion, I am not going to end anyway), and I have begun to recoil from the *Inferno*, an authentically terrifying if sublime work. I do keep going back to the *Purgatorio*, for reasons wonderfully phrased by W. S. Merwin in the foreword to his admirable translation of the middle canticle of the *Commedia*.

Of the three sections of the poem, only *Purgatorio* happens *on* the earth, as our lives do, with our feet on the ground, crossing a beach, climbing a mountain. . . . To the very top of the mountain hope is mixed with pain, which brings it still closer to the living present. (xiii).

My friends all differ on which canto of the *Purgatorio* is their personal favorite; I choose the vision of Matilda gathering flowers, in the Earthly Paradise of canto 28. The first 51 lines, beautifully rendered by Merwin, I give here in Percy Bysshe Shelley's ecstatic version, his only extended translation from the *Commedia*:

And earnest to explore within—around—
The divine wood, whose thick green living woof
Tempered the young day to the sight—I wound

Up the green slope, beneath the forest's roof,
With slow, soft steps leaving the mountain's steep,
And sought those inmost labyrinths, motion-proof

Against the air, that in that stillness deep
And solemn, struck upon my forehead bare,
The slow, soft, stroke of a continuous . . .

In which the leaves tremblingly were
All bent towards that part where earliest
The sacred hill obscures the morning air.

Yet were they not so shaken from the rest,
But that the birds, perched on the utmost spray,
Incessantly renewing their blithe quest,

With perfect joy received the early day,
Singing within the glancing leaves, whose sound
Kept a low burden to their roundelay,

Such as from bough to bough gathers around
The pine forest on bleak Chiassi's shore,
When Aeolus Sirocco has unbound.

My slow steps had already borne me o'er
Such space within the antique wood, that I
Perceived not where I entered any more,—

When, lo! A stream whose little waves went by,
Bending towards the left through grass that grew
Upon its bank, impeded suddenly

My going on. Water of purest hue
On earth, would appear turbid and impure
Compared with this, whose unconcealing dew,

Dark, dark, yet clear, moved under the obscure
Eternal shades, whose interwoven looms
The rays of moon or sunlight ne'er endure.

I moved not with my feet, but mid the glooms
Pierced with my charmed eye, contemplating
The mighty multitude of fresh May blooms

Which starred that night, when, even as a thing
That suddenly, for blank astonishment,
Charms every sense, and makes all thought take wing,—

A solitary woman! and she went
Singing and gathering flower after flower,
With which her way was painted and besprent.

“Bright lady, who, if looks had ever power
To bear true witness of the heart within,
Dost bask under the beams of love, come lower

“Towards this bank. I prithee let me win
This much of thee, to come, that I may hear
Thy song: like Proserpine, in Enna's glen,

“Thou seemest to my fancy, singing here
And gathering flowers, as that fair maiden when
She lost the Spring, and Ceres her, more dear.”

Shelley keeps the terza rima (which Dante had invented) at some expense to the original's literal meaning, but he catches the surprises and splendor of the advent of Matilda, who has reversed the fall of Proserpina and of Eve, and who presages the imminent return of the vision of Beatrice to Dante. Shakespeare, in act 4, scene 4 of *The Winter's Tale*, may also hover in Shelley's memory, since Perdita is Shakespeare's equivalent of Matilda.

O Proserpina,
 For the flowers now that frightened, thou let'st fall
 From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
 That come before the swallow dares, and take
 The winds of March with beauty . . .

Why Dante named this singing girl of a restored Eden Matilda (Matelda) is something of a puzzle, explained away differently by various scholars. Dante's Matilda makes only a brief appearance, but I perversely prefer her to Beatrice, who scolds and preaches and is endlessly too good for Dante. Like Shakespeare's Perdita, Matilda charms us. Who but the ferocious Dante could fall in love again with the heavenly Beatrice? Who would not fall in love with Matilda, as translated here by William Merwin?

"and it tastes sweeter than any other,
 and although your thirst might be completely
 satisfied if I revealed no more.

"I will add a corollary, as a favor,
 And I do not think my words will be less dear
 To you because they go beyond my promise.

"Those who sang in ancient times of the age
 Of gold and of its happy state saw this place,
 Perhaps, in their dreams on Parnassus.

"Here the root of humankind was innocent.
 Here Spring and every fruit lasted forever;
 When they told of nectar this is what each meant."

Gracious and beautiful, the mysterious epitome of a young woman in love, Matilda walks with Dante through the meadows as though the Golden Age had returned. Matilda moves like a dancer, and we need not slow her pace by piling allegories on her or by relating her to historical noblewomen or blessed contemplatives. Dante, notoriously susceptible to the beauty of women, clearly would fall in love with Matilda, if the transmogrified Beatrice, as much chiding mother as image of desire, were not waiting for him in the next canto.

William Hazlitt, superb literary critic of British romanticism, had a far more ambivalent reaction to Dante than Shelley and Byron did, yet Hazlitt caught at the truth of Dante's originality, the effect of Dante's genius:

he interests only by his exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been excited; but he seizes on the attention, by showing us the effect they produce on his feelings; and his poetry accordingly frequently gives us the thrilling and overwhelming sensation which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror.

Hazlitt was thinking of the *Inferno*, and not of Matilda in the *Purgatorio*, where the sensation is that of gazing upon a face who has seen an ultimate object of delight.

The Divine Comedy

Dante, by common consent, stands with the supreme Western masters of literary representation: the Yahwist, Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Milton, Tolstoy, Proust. Our ideas as to how reality can be represented by literary language depend, to a considerable extent, on this ninefold. Perhaps it can also be said that these writers have formed a large part of our experience of what is called reality. Certain aspects of reality might not be nearly so visible had we not read these nine masters of mimesis. Setting the Yahwist and Homer aside as being both ancient and hypothetical, only Shakespeare, again by common consent, is judged to be Dante's rival as a great original in representation. But Shakespearean representation has naturalized us in its domain. Dante is now an immensely difficult poet partly because we are so much at home with Shakespeare.

Erich Auerbach, who with Charles S. Singleton and John Freccero makes up a celestial trinity of Dante interpreters, gave us the definitive opening description of Dante's ways of representing reality:

Dante in the *Comedy* transcended tragic death by identifying man's ultimate fate with the earthly unity of his personality, and . . . the very plan of the work made it possible, and indeed confronted him with the obligation, to represent earthly reality exactly as he saw it. Thus it became necessary that the characters in Dante's other world, in their situation and attitude, should represent the sum of themselves; that they should disclose, in a single act, the character and fate that had filled out their lives . . .

. . . from classical theory Dante took over only one principle, the *sibi constare*, or consistency, of his persons; all other tenets had lost their literal meaning for him . . . Dante's vision is a tragedy according to Aristotle's definition. In any event it is far more a tragedy

than an epic, for the descriptive, epic elements in the poem are not autonomous, but serve other purposes, and the time, for Dante as well as his characters, is not the epic time in which destiny gradually unfolds, but the final time in which it is fulfilled.

If time is the final time, past all unfolding, then reality indeed can be represented in a single act that is at once character and fate. Dante's personages can reveal themselves totally in what they say and do, but they cannot change *because* of what Dante has them say and do. Chaucer, who owed Dante more than he would acknowledge, nevertheless departed from Dante in this, which is precisely where Chaucer most influenced Shakespeare. The Pardoner listens to himself speaking, listens to his own tale, and is darkly made doom-eager through just that listening. This mode of representation expands in Shakespeare to a point that no writer since has reached so consistently. Hamlet may be the most metamorphic of Shakespeare's people (or it may be Cleopatra, or Falstaff, or who you will), but as such he merely sets the mode. Nearly everyone of consequence in Shakespeare helps inaugurate a mimetic style we all now take too much for granted. They, like us, are strengthened or victimized, reach an apotheosis or are destroyed, by themselves reacting to what they say and do. It may be that we have learned to affect ourselves so strongly, in part because involuntarily we imitate Shakespeare's characters. We never imitate Dante's creatures because we do not live in finalities; we know that we are not fulfilled.

A literary text can represent a fulfilled reality only if it can persuade itself, and momentarily persuade us, that one text can fulfill another. Dante, as Auerbach demonstrated, relied on the great Christian trope of *figura*, whose basis was the insistence that the Christian New Testament had fulfilled what it called "the Old Testament," itself a phrase deeply offensive to normative Jews who continue to trust in the Covenant as set forth in the Hebrew Bible. But the Hebrew Bible indeed must be the Old Testament, if Christianity is to retain its power. What must the New Testament be, if Dante's poem is to develop and maintain its force?

Auerbach, quoting the Church Father Tertullian's comments on the renaming of Oshea, son of Nun, by Moses as Jehoshua (Joshua, Jesus), speaks of Joshua as "a figure of things to come." The definition of this figure of prophecy or *figura* by Auerbach is now classic: "*Figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is real and historical." Equally classic is Auerbach's formulation of "figural interpretation":

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the

second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The first two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life. Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions; these are quite secondary, since promise and fulfillment are real historical events, which have either happened in the incarnation of the Word, or will happen in the second coming.

What happens when figural interpretation is transferred from sacred to secular literature? When Dante takes the historical Virgil and reads him as a *figura* of which Dante's character, Virgil, is the fulfillment, are we seeing the same pattern enacted as when Tertullian reads Joshua as the *figura* of which Jesus Christ was the fulfillment? Auerbach's answer is "yes," but this is a dialectical affirmative: "Thus Virgil in the *Divine Comedy* is the historical Virgil himself, but then again he is not; for the historical Virgil is only a *figura* of the fulfilled truth that the poem reveals, and this fulfillment is more real, more significant than the *figura*." Auerbach, writing on *figura* back in 1944, thought back to his book on Dante as poet of the secular world (1929) and insisted that he had acquired "a solid historical grounding" for his view of 15 years before.

I am not certain that the earlier Auerbach is not to be preferred to the later. In secularizing *figura*, Auerbach dangerously idealized the relationship between literary texts. Appropriating the historical, Virgil is not an idealizing gesture, as John Freccero shows in his superb essay, "Manfred's Wounds and the Poetics of the *Purgatorio*." Poetic fathers die hard, and Dante understood that he had made the historical Virgil the *figura* and his own Virgil the fulfillment, partly in order to suggest that he himself was the poet Virgil's true fulfillment. Great poets are pragmatists when they deal with precursors; witness Blake's caricature of Milton as the hero of his poem *Milton*, or James Merrill's loving and witty portrayal of Wallace Stevens and W. H. Auden in *The Changing Light at Sandover*. Dante's Virgil is no more the historical Virgil than Blake's Milton is the historical Milton. If texts fulfill each other, it is always through some self-serving caricature of the earlier text by the later.

Charles S. Singleton, carefully reminding us that "Beatrice is not Christ," expounds Dante's use of the principle of analogy, which likens the advent of Beatrice to the advent of Christ:

Thus it is that the figure of a rising sun by which Beatrice comes at last to stand upon the triumphal chariot is the most revealing

image which the poet might have found not only to affirm the analogy of her advent to Christ's in the present tense, but to stress, in so doing, the very basis upon which that analogy rests: the advent of light.

Whitman, certainly a poet antithetical to Dante, opposed himself to the rising sun as a greater rising sun:

Dazzling and tremendous how quick the sun-rise would kill me,
If I could not now and always send sun-rise out of me.

We also ascend dazzling and tremendous as the sun,
We found our own O my soul in the calm and cool of the
daybreak.

This is not analogy but a subversive mode akin to Nietzsche's and learned from Emerson. The figure of the Whitmanian sun here is not an advent of Christ ("a great defeat," Emerson called that advent) but is "now and always" a perpetual dawning ("we demand victory," as Emerson said for his Americans, prophesying Whitman). The figure of Beatrice, to Whitman, might as well have been the figure of Christ. Can we, with Singleton, accept her as an analogy, or is she now the principal embarrassment of Dante's poem? As a fiction she retains her force, but does not Dante present her as more than a fiction? If Dante wrote, as Singleton says, the allegory of the theologians rather than the allegory of the poets, how are we to recapture Dante's sense of Beatrice if we do not accept the analogy that likens her advent to Christ's?

Singleton's answer is that Beatrice is the representation of wisdom in a Christian sense, or the light of grace. This answer, though given in the allegorical language of the theologians rather than that of the poets, remains a poetic answer because its analogical matrix is light rather than grace. Dante persuades us not by his theology but by his occult mastery of the trope of light, in which he surpasses even the blind Milton among the poets:

There is a light up there which makes the Creator visible to the
creature, who finds his peace only in seeing Him.

(*Paradiso* XXX, 100–02)

This, as Singleton says, is the light of glory rather than the light of grace, which is Beatrice's, or the natural light, which is Virgil's. Dante's peculiar gift is to find perpetually valid analogies for all three lights. Since his poem's fiction of duration is not temporal but final, all three modes of light must be

portrayed by him as though they were beyond change. And yet an unchanging fiction cannot give pleasure, as Dante clearly knew. What does he give us that more than compensates for his poem's apparent refusal of temporal anguish?

Auerbach, in his essay on St. Francis of Assisi in the *Commedia*, turned to *figura* again as his answer. To the medieval reader, according to Auerbach, the representations of forerunning and after-following repetitions were as familiar as the trope of "historical development" is (or was, to those who believe that Foucault forever exposed the trope). To us, now, "forerunning and after-following repetitions" suggest, not *figura* and its fulfillment, but the Freudian death drive as the "fulfillment" of the compulsion to repeat. The repetition compulsion perhaps is the final Western *figura*, prophesying our urge to drive beyond the pleasure principle. That is to say, for us the only text that can fulfill earlier texts, rather than correct or negate them, is what might be called "the text of death," which is totally opposed to what Dante sought to write.

What saves Dante from the idealizing lameness that necessarily haunts the allegorizing of the theologians? The earlier Auerbach was on the track of the answer when he meditated on Dante's originality in the representation of persons. As seer, Dante identified character and fate, *ethos* and *daemon*, and what he saw in his contemporaries he transferred precisely to the three final worlds of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. Dante's friends and enemies alike are presented, without ambiguity or ambivalence, as being consistent with themselves, beyond change, their eternal destinies overdetermined by their fixed characters.

There are endless surprises in his poem for Dante himself, as for us, but there are no accidents. Farinata standing upright in his tomb, as if of Hell he had a great disdain, is heroic because he is massively consistent with himself, in his own tomb and can be nothing but what he is. His marvelous disdain of hell represents a kind of necessity, what Wallace Stevens called the inescapable necessity of being that inescapable animal, oneself. Such a necessity is presented by Dante as being the judgment of heaven on us.

In Shakespeare, there are always accidents, and character can be as metamorphic as personality. Hamlet yields himself up to accident, at the last, perhaps because he has all but exhausted the possibilities for change that even his protean character possesses. This is our mode of representation, inherited by us from Shakespeare, and we no longer are able to see how original it originally was. Shakespeare therefore seems "natural" to us, even though we live in the age of Freud, who suspected darkly that there were no accidents, once we were past infancy. Dante no longer can be naturalized in our imaginations. His originality has not been lost for us, and yet his difficulty or strangeness for us is probably not caused by his authentic originality.

The allegory of the theologians simply is not an available mode for us, despite the labors of Auerbach and Singleton. Freccero has replaced them as the most relevant of Dante critics because he has returned Dante to what may be the truest, because least idealizing, allegory of the poets, which is the agon of poet against poet, the struggle for imaginative priority between forerunner and latecomer. Despite a marvelous parody by Borges, theologians are not primarily agonists. Dante understood that poets were. The light of glory, the light of grace, the light of nature are not competing lights, and yet all tropes for them necessarily compete and always with other tropes.

Singleton, rejecting the allegory of the poets, said that it would reduce Dante's Virgil to a mere personification of Reason:

For if this is the allegory of poets, then what Virgil does, like what Orpheus does, is a fiction devised to convey a hidden meaning which it ought to convey all the time, since only by conveying that other meaning is what he does justified at all. Instead, if this action is allegory as theologians take it, then this action must always have a literal sense which is historical and no fiction; and thus Virgil's deeds as part of the whole action may, in their turn, be as words signifying other things, but they do not have to do this all the time, because, being historical, those deeds exist simply in their own right.

But what if Virgil, as allegory of the poets, were to be read not as Reason, the light of nature, but as the trope of that light, reflecting among much else the lusters of the tears of universal nature? To say farewell to Virgil is to take leave not of Reason but of the pathos of a certain natural light, perhaps of Wordsworth's "light of common day." Dante abandons Virgil not so as to substitute grace for reason but so as to find his own image of voice, his own trope for all three lights. In the oldest and most authentic allegory of the poets, Virgil represents not reason but poetic fatherhood, the scene of instruction that Dante must transcend if he is to complete his journey to Beatrice.

The figure of Beatrice, in my own experience as a reader, is now the most difficult of all Dante's tropes, because sublimation no longer seems to be a human possibility. What is lost, perhaps permanently, is the tradition that moves between Dante and Yeats, in which sublimated desire for a woman can be regarded as an enlargement of existence. One respected feminist critic has gone so far as to call Beatrice a "dumb broad," since she supposedly contemplates the One without understanding Him. What James Thurber grimly celebrated as the War between Men and Women has claimed many recent literary casualties, but none perhaps so unmerited as Dante's Beatrice. Dante, like

tradition, thought that God's Wisdom, who daily played before His feet, was a woman, even as Nietzsche, with a gesture beyond irony, considered Truth to be a woman, presumably a deathly one. We possess art in order not to perish from the truth, Nietzsche insisted, which must mean that the aesthetic is a way of not being destroyed by a woman. Dante hardly would have agreed.

Beatrice is now so difficult to apprehend precisely because she participates both in the allegory of the poets and in the allegory of the philosophers. Her advent follows Dante's poetic maturation, or the vanishing of the precursor, Virgil. In the allegory of the poets, Beatrice is the Muse whose function is to help the poet remember. Since remembering, in poetry, is the major mode of cognition, Beatrice is Dante's power of invention, the essence of his art. That means she is somehow the highest of the Muses and yet far above them also, since in Dante's version of the allegory of the poets, Beatrice has "a place in the objective process of salvation," as Ernst Robert Curtius phrased it. Curtius rightly emphasized the extent of Dante's audacity:

Guido Guinicelli (d. 1276) had made the exaltation of the beloved to an angel of paradise a topos of Italian lyric. To choose as guide in a poetic vision of the otherworld a loved woman who has been thus exalted is still within the bounds of Christian philosophy and faith. But Dante goes much further than this. He gives Beatrice a place in the objective process of salvation. Her function is thought of as not only for himself but also for all believers. Thus, on his own authority, he introduces into the Christian revelation an element which disrupts the doctrine of the church. This is either heresy—or myth.

It is now customary to speak of Dante as *the* Catholic poet, even as Milton is called *the* Protestant poet. Perhaps someday Kafka will be named as *the* Jewish writer, though his distance from normative Judaism was infinite. Dante and Milton were not less idiosyncratic, each in his own time, than Kafka was in ours, and the figure of Beatrice would be heresy and not myth if Dante had not been so strong a poet that the Church of later centuries has been happy to claim him. Curtius centered on Dante's vision of himself as a prophet, even insisting that Dante expected the prophecy's fulfillment in the immediate future, during his own lifetime. Since Dante died at the age of 56, a quarter-century away from the "perfect" age of 81 set forth in his *Convivio*, the literal force of the prophecy presumably was voided. But the prophecy, still hidden from us, matters nevertheless, as Curtius again maintains:

Even if we could interpret his prophecy, that would give it no meaning for us. What Dante hid, Dante scholarship need not now

unriddle. But it must take seriously the fact that Dante believed that he had an apocalyptic mission. This must be taken into consideration in interpreting him. Hence the question of Beatrice is not mere idle curiosity. Dante's system is built up in the first two cantos of the *Inferno*, it supports the entire *Commedia*. Beatrice can be seen only within it. The Lady Nine has become a cosmic power which emanates from two superior powers. A hierarchy of celestial powers which intervene in the process of history—this concept is manifestly related to Gnosticism: as an intellectual construction, a schema of intellectual contemplation, if perhaps not in origin. Such constructions can and must be pointed out. We do not know what Dante meant by Lucia. The only proper procedure for the commentator, then, is to admit that we do not know and to say that neither the ophthalmological explanation nor the allegorical interpretations are satisfactory. Exegesis is also bound to give its full weight to all the passages at the end of the *Purgatorio* and in the *Paradiso* which are opposed to the identification of Beatrice with the daughter of the banker Portinari. Beatrice is a myth created by Dante.

Very little significant criticism of Dante has followed this suggestion of Curtius, and a distorted emphasis on Dante's supposed orthodoxy has been the result. Curtius certainly does not mean that Dante was a Gnostic, but he does remind us that Dante's Beatrice is the central figure in a purely personal gnosis. Dante indeed was a ruthless visionary, passionate and willful, whose poem triumphantly expresses his own unique personality. The *Commedia*, though one would hardly know this from most of its critics (Freccero is the sublime exception), is an immense trope of pathos or power, the power of the individual who was Dante. The pathos of that personality is most felt, perhaps, in the great and final parting of Beatrice from her poet, in the middle of Canto XXXI of the *Paradiso*, at the moment when her place as guide is transferred to the aged St. Bernard:

Already my glance had taken in the whole general form of Paradise but had not yet dwelt on any part of it, and I turned with new-kindled eagerness to question my Lady of things on which my mind was in suspense. One thing I intended, and another encountered me: I thought to see Beatrice, and I saw an old man, clothed like that glorious company. His eyes and his cheeks were suffused with a gracious gladness, and his aspect was of such kindness as befits a tender father. And "Where is she?" I said in haste; and he replied:

“To end thy longing Beatrice sent me from my place; and if thou look up into the third circle from the highest tier thou shalt see her again, in the throne her merits have assigned to her.” Without answering, I lifted up my eyes and saw her where she made for herself a crown, reflecting from her the eternal beams. From the highest region where it thunders no mortal eye is so far, were it lost in the depth of the sea, as was my sight there from Beatrice; but to me it made no difference, for her image came down to me undimmed by aught between. “O Lady in whom my hope has its strength and who didst bear for my salvation to leave thy footprints in Hell, of all the things that I have seen I acknowledge the grace and the virtue to be from thy power and from thy goodness. It is thou who hast drawn me from bondage into liberty by all those ways, by every means for it that was in thy power. Preserve in me thy great bounty, so that my spirit, which thou hast made whole, may be loosed from the body well-pleasing to thee.” I prayed thus; and she, so far off as she seemed, smiled and looked at me, then turned again to the eternal fount.

It is difficult to comment on the remorseless strength of this, on its apparent sublimation of a myth-making drive that here accepts a restraint that is more than rhetorical. Freud in his own great *summa*, the essay of 1937, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” lamented his inability to cure those who could not accept the cure:

A man will not be subject to a father-substitute or owe him anything and he therefore refuses to accept his cure from the physician.

Dante, too, would not owe any man anything, not even if the man were Virgil, his poetic father. The cure had been accepted by Dante from his physician, Beatrice. In smiling and looking at him, as they part, she confirms the cure.

TEODOLINDA BAROLINI

*Purgatory as Paradigm: Traveling the New and
Never-Before-Traveled Path of This Life/Poem*

Fr. Nulla me deinceps accusatione turbaveris. Dic ingenue quicquid
est, quod me transversum agat.

Aug. Rerum temporalium appetitus.

(Petrarch, *Secretum*)

The narrative of the *Commedia* is a line intersected by other lines; it is a “vedere interciso da novo obietto,” a seeing interrupted by new things, the *novi obietti* or *cose nove* that do not trouble angels. It is a voyage intersected by other voyages; each time the pilgrim meets a soul, his lifeline intersects another lifeline. In hell he encounters failed voyages, journeys that have ended in failure. Ulysses’ special stature within the poem derives in no small measure from the fact that his lifeline concludes with a literal voyage that has literally failed, so that he, alone among the souls Dante encounters, unites the poem’s formal and thematic values: he both represents a failed voyage (one among many), and he recounts a failed voyage (uniquely). While in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* the moving pilgrim encounters perfected voyages, voyages that have achieved either the stasis of failure or the peace of success, in *Purgatorio* all the intersecting lifelines are in motion, voyaging in time—just as on earth all parties in any encounter are moving forward along their respective lines of becoming. (In fact, because the *Purgatorio* swerves so fundamentally from the *Commedia*’s basic narrative structure,

From *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, pp. 99–121, 298–306. Copyright © 1992 by Princeton University Press.

whereby a moving figure encounters stationary ones, the poet compensates by ritualizing the narrative components of the seven terraces, so that, if the pilgrim does not meet fixed souls, he does meet a fixed pattern of angels, encounters, and examples.)¹ Given its temporal dimension, the narrative of the second canticle is most akin, in its rhythm, to the narrative of life; its *cammino* is most similar to the “nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita” described in the *Convivio*, in a passage that provides the clearest exposition of life as voyage to be found in Dante’s oeuvre:²

... lo sommo desiderio di ciascuna cosa, e prima da la natura dato, è lo ritornare a lo suo principio. E però che Dio è principio de le nostre anime e fattore di quelle simili a sé (sì come è scritto: “Facciamo l’uomo ad imagine e similitudine nostra”), essa anima massimamente desidera di tornare a quello. E sì come peregrino che va per una via per la quale mai non fue, che ogni casa che da lungi vede crede che sia l’albergo, e non trovando ciò essere, dirizza la credenza a l’altra, e così di casa in casa, tanto che a l’albergo viene; così l’anima nostra, incontanente che nel nuovo e mai non fatto cammino di questa vita entra, dirizza li occhi al termine del suo sommo bene, e però, qualunque cosa vede che paia in sé avere alcuno bene, crede che sia esso. E perché la sua conoscenza prima è imperfetta, per non essere esperta nè dottrinata, piccioli beni le paiono grandi, e però da quelli comincia prima a desiderare. Onde vedemo li parvuli desiderare massimamente un pomo; e poi, più procedendo, desiderare uno augellino; e poi, più oltre, desiderare bel vestimento; e poi lo cavallo; e poi una donna; e poi ricchezza non grande, e poi grande, e poi più. E questo incontra perché in nulla di queste cose truova quella che va cercando, e credela trovare più oltre.

The greatest desire of each thing, given first by nature, is to return to its beginning. And since God is the beginning of our souls and maker of those similar to himself (as is written: “Let us make man in our image and likeness”), the soul desires above all to return to him. And like the pilgrim who travels on a road on which he has never been, who thinks that every house he sees from a distance is the inn, and finding that it is not, redirects his belief to the next, and thus from house to house, until he comes to the inn; so our soul, as soon as it enters on the new and never before traveled path of this life, straightens its eyes to the terminus of its highest good, and then, whatever thing it sees that seems to have some good in

it, the soul believes that it is that terminus. And because the soul's knowledge is at first imperfect, because it is neither expert nor learned, small goods seem to it to be big goods, and so from these it begins at first to desire. So we see children desire above all an apple; and then, proceeding further, a little bird; and then, further still, beautiful clothing; and then a horse; and then a lady; and then not great riches; and then great riches; and then more. And this happens because in none of these things does the soul find what it is looking for, and it believes that it will find it further on.

(*Conv.* 4.12.14–16)

This passage is virtually a blueprint for the *Commedia*. We begin with desire, the supreme desire to return to our origin; this desire provides the energy that moves the pilgrim along his road, a road on which he has never before traveled, one that is thus by definition new. In the same way that the pilgrim mistakes the houses that he sees along the road for the inn, the place of legitimate repose, so the soul on the new and never before traveled path of life mistakes the little goods that it encounters for the supreme good that it seeks. Our progress on the path of life is figured linguistically as successiveness: we desire something, “e poi, più procedendo,” we desire something new, “e poi, più oltre,” something new again, and so on as by virtue of a succession of *e pois* our desires grow ever greater, and we create what Dante will shortly describe as a pyramid of objects of desire. This rhythm of escalating desire figures the narrative rhythm of the poem, also a continuum in which forward progress is marked by encounters with successive new things. In particular, the *Convivio* passage figures the *Purgatorio*, where the desire to see and know new things is insistently underscored, where for the first time the pilgrim is among other pilgrims: “Voi credete / forse che siamo esperti d’esto loco; / ma not siam peregrin come voi siete” (“You think perhaps that we are experts regarding this place, but we are pilgrims as you are” [*Purg.* 2.61–63]).³ Like their counterparts in the *Convivio*, the voyagers in the second realm are repeatedly shown to be neither *esperti* nor *dottrinati* but rather strangers in a strange land, whose ignorance triggers their frequent *maraviglia*. Most importantly, the souls of purgatory are learning to devalue the *piccioli beni* by which they were tempted as they journeyed along the path of life, to exchange such goods for the supreme good to which they are now returning. The very idea of a return to the beginning (“lo ritornare a lo principio”), of a progression forward to the past,⁴ finds its precise counterpart only in purgatory, where forward motion is a way of recuperating and redeeming the past, of returning to lost innocence and our collective point of origin, the garden of Eden. Only purgatory is the place where “tempo per tempo si ristora” (*Purg.*

23.84), where time is restored to us so that we can undo in time what we did in time.⁵ Indeed, the experience of purgatory is the conversion of the old back into the new: the unmaking of memory, in which the once new has been stored as old.

No episode in *Inferno* or *Paradiso* captures the essence of the earthly pilgrimage like the Casella episode at the beginning of *Purgatorio*, whose structure faithfully replicates life's—and terza rima's—continual dialectic between forward motion and backward glance, voyage and repose, illicit curiosity and necessary desire. On the one hand the poet stages Cato's rebuke, thus acknowledging the idea of a premature repose, a lapse into misdirected desire. On the other the poet valorizes the object of desire that occasions the rebuke, the lyric whose sweetness “ancor dentro mi suona” (“still sounds within me” [*Purg.* 2.114]). The authority of the present tense and the adverb *ancora* prohibits us from crudely labeling the experience “wrong”; rather we must attend to both constitutive elements within the spiral of desire, fully present only in the second realm: both the desire that functions as goad (here Cato), and the desire that functions nostalgically (here Casella's song). One could restate the above by saying that the *Purgatorio* is the most Augustinian of Dante's three canticles. The *Inferno*, by contrast, draws on the spirit of the Old Testament, while the *Paradiso* is informed by saints of both newer and older vintage, such as Francis and Peter (though Benedict belongs to Augustine's middle period). Perhaps the much debated absence of Augustine from Dante's poem is related to the Augustinian basis of the second realm: Augustinianism—like memory itself—is a presence in purgatory more than in paradise, but there is in purgatory, as we shall see, another vigorous spokesperson for the saint's thought, namely Beatrice. In other words, Dante uses Augustinian doctrine in the realm where separation from earthly objects of desire is still problematic, to provide the philosophical basis for such separation, much as Petrarch uses Augustine in the *Secretum*; however, the Augustine role is assigned to Beatrice, who in a sense therefore becomes a substitute Augustine.⁶

Purgatorio is the canticle in which the restless heart of the Christian pilgrim is most literally dramatized, embodied not only by Dante but by all the souls he meets. Its “plot” hinges on an Augustinian view of temporal goods as inherently dissatisfying because of their mortality, as necessarily dissatisfying even when they are (in Augustine's words) “things perfectly legitimate in themselves, which cannot be relinquished without regret.”⁷ The tension between the legitimacy of the object of desire on the one hand and the need to relinquish it on the other is the tension that sustains the second canticle of the *Commedia*, the tension that Dante maximizes and exploits in order to create the bittersweet elegiac poetry of *Purgatorio*: “biondo era e bello e di gentile aspetto, / *ma* l'un de' cigli un colpo avea diviso” (“blond he was and

beautiful and of gentle aspect, *but* a blow had divided one of his eyebrows" [*Purg.* 3.107–8]). The first verse renders Manfredi's desirability, which is the desirability of what Petrarch calls the "cosa bella mortal"; we want him as we want on earth, without thought of sublimation. Then, after evoking nostalgically the earthly object in its earthly beauty, the second verse, beginning with the adversative, tells us the problem: it is wounded, imperfect, fallen; or, to complete Petrarch's thought, "cosa bella mortal passa, et non dura" ("the beautiful mortal thing passes, and does not last" [*Canzoniere* 248.8]). The second verse brings us back to why there need be a purgatory, to the fact that even the most beautiful of earthly things is always compromised, wounded, mortal, that therefore we must learn to love different things, in a different way. The spiral of conversion that moves away from the noble temporal goods for which the soul feels a backward-turning love in the direction of their eternal counterparts is paradigmatically rendered in the concluding verses of *Purgatorio* 28, where the pilgrim "lapses" toward his classical poets and "converts" to Beatrice: "Io mi rivolsi 'n dietro allora tutto / a' miei poeti . . . poi a la bella donna torna' il viso" ("I turned all backward to my poets; then to the beautiful lady returned my face" [*Purg.* 28.145–46, 148]).

The second canticle tells of the soul's voyage from desiring successive new things to becoming itself new: "Voi siete nuovi" says Matelda to the travelers in *Purgatorio* 28.76, and although she means "newly arrived," her words also adumbrate the souls' newly minted condition at purgatory's end. The theme of voyage is linked to the search for the new in a way that recalls the *Convivio's* pilgrim passage, where the traveler goes successively from one *bene*—one new thing—to the next. As in the paradigmatic Casella episode, the *Purgatorio* offers us both the necessary encounter with the new, with the "altra novità ch'apparve allora" ("other novelty that then appeared" [*Purg.* 26.27]) and the refusal to be detoured by the new, like the man who "vassi a la via sua, che che li appaia" ("goes on along his path, whatever appears to him" [*Purg.* 25.5]). In typical purgatorial language, Matelda constitutes a necessary detour, a "cosa che disvia / per maraviglia tutto altro pensare" ("thing that for wonder detours all other thought" [*Purg.* 28.38–39]), while the seven virtues who escort the pilgrim in the earthly paradise stop at the water as a guide stops "se trova novitate o sue vestigge" ("if he finds a new thing or its traces" [*Purg.* 33.108]). In fact, the importance of the *cosa nova* for the *Purgatorio* is such as to strongly support Petrocchi's restoration of "novità" in place of "vanità" in *Purgatorio* 31.60, where Beatrice castigates the pilgrim for having continued to pursue, after her death, "altra novità con sì breve uso" ("another novelty of such brief use"). Thus formulated, Beatrice's rebuke resonates with the voyage of life, the "vedere interciso da novo obietto," and with the reminder that she was the pilgrim's ultimate *cosa nova*.⁸ *Novità* is a temporally charged way—a

profoundly Augustinian way—of saying *vanità*, a synonym of *vanità* that says everything it says and more, by adding the temporal dimension of voyage and pilgrimage that is key to this temporal realm. The Augustinian basis of the second canticle is rooted in its temporality, its overwhelming concern to trace the will's transition—in time—from mortal to immortal objects of desire, from objects of “brief use” to objects that the soul can “enjoy” indefinitely. Beatrice's “con sì breve uso” is strikingly coincident with Augustine's injunction to use earthly things rather than enjoy them.⁹ The dimension of time, transition, successiveness—so fundamental to Augustine's analysis of the human condition that even eating is analyzed from a temporal perspective (it spreads its snares of concupiscence in the transition, “in ipso transitu,” from hunger to satiety)¹⁰—is the dimension in which the purgatorial soul undertakes what is an essentially Augustinian pilgrimage.

The Augustinian aspect of Dante's thought finds its gloss in the pilgrim passage of *Convivio* 4.12, which echoes *Confessions* 1.19: “non haec ipsa sunt quae a paedagogis et magistris, a nucibus et pilulis et passeribus, ad praefectos et reges, aurum, praedia, mancipia, haec ipsa omnino succedentibus maioribus aetatibus transeunt” (“For commanders and kings may take the place of tutors and schoolmasters, nuts and balls and pet birds may give way to money and estates and servants, but these same passions remain with us while one stage of life follows upon another”). Augustine's *passer* becomes Dante's *augellino*, Augustine's *aurum* becomes Dante's *ricchezza*; both authors are concerned with the transitoriness (“transeunt”) of life and the successiveness of human desire, which remains constant in its inconstancy as it passes to the “succeeding older ages” of our lives—the “succedentibus maioribus aetatibus.” The pilgrim passage of *Convivio* 4.12 is translated into verse at the very heart of the *Purgatorio*, in canto 16's description of the newborn soul which, sent forth by a happy maker upon the path of life (“mossa da lieto fattore” [*Purg.* 16.89]), willingly turns toward all that brings delight (“volontier torna a ciò che la trastulla” [90]).¹¹ The voyage is perilous, and the simple little soul that knows nothing, “l'anima semplicità che sa nulla” (16.88),¹² is distracted by the very desire that also serves as necessary catalyst and propeller for its forward motion: “Di picciol bene in pria sente sapore; / quivi s'inganna, e dietro ad esso corre, / se guida o fren non torce suo amore” (“First the soul tastes the savor of a small good; there it deceives itself and runs after, if guide or curb does not twist its love” [91–93]). The spiritual motion of the soul that runs after little goods—“piccioli beni” is the expression used in both the treatise and the poem—is explained in the *Convivio*, where we learn that this errancy occurs because, to the inexperienced soul, “piccioli beni le paiono grandi, e però da quelli comincia prima a desiderare.” The crucial point at which the soul is deceived, the node where desire and spiritual motion meet free will

and justice, provides the point of departure for the anatomy of desire that dominates the *Commedia's* "mezzo del cammin," an analysis that responds to the following queries: to whom is the blame of the soul's self-deception to be charged, to the stars or to itself, and is there any guidance to help it on its way? (canto 16); in what different forms can the soul's self-deception manifest itself, i.e., what forms can misdirected desire assume? (canto 17); what is the process whereby such self-deception occurs, i.e., what is the process whereby the soul falls in love? (canto 18).

At the end of canto 17 we learn that love is the seed of all human activity, whether it be good or evil ("amor sementa in voi d'ogne virtute / e d'ogne operacion che merta pene" ["love is the seed in you of every virtue and of every act that merits suffering" (*Purg.* 17.104–5)]); this principle—which implies that love is the foundation for hell as well as purgatory—is restated at the outset of canto 18: "amore, a cui reduci / ogne buono operare e 'l suo contrario" ("love, to which you reduce all good action and its contrary" [*Purg.* 18.14–15]). In other words, desire is the motive force for all our actions. Again, the struggling traveler of *Convivio* 4.12 provides the model for the purgatorial meditation; in the *Convivio* too the seeker is driven by his desire from one "good" to the next, in search of the object of desire that will finally bring desire to an end: "Ciascun confusamente un bene apprende / nel qual si queti l'animo, e disira; / per che di giugner lui ciascun contende" ("Each of us confusedly apprehends a good in which the soul may rest, and this it desires; to reach this good each of us contends" [*Purg.* 17.127–29]). This view of life as a struggle along the pathway of desire, a view that profoundly informs the *Commedia's* narrativity, is elaborated in canto 18, where we learn that the soul, seized by love, begins to desire, that desire is precisely the motion of the soul as it follows after the object it craves (which it seeks to apprehend, to possess), and that such motion will never cease—the soul will never rest—until the beloved object gives it joy: "così l'animo preso entra in disire, / ch'è moto spiritale, e mai non posa / fin che la cosa amata il fa gioire" (*Purg.* 18.31–33).

The second canticle's Augustinian thematic of spiritual motion finds its peculiarly Dantesque focus in canto 19's evocation of Ulysses.¹³ It is here that the *dolce serena* of the pilgrim's dream, later exposed as a stinking, stuttering hag and thus the embodiment of the false and misleading desires expiated on purgatory's top three terraces, boasts that she was able to detour Ulysses from his path: "Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago / al canto mio" ("I turned Ulysses, desirous of the journey, with my song" [*Purg.* 19.22–23]). This alignment of the Greek voyager with the *dolce serena* is of great significance within the poem's anatomy of desire. The terraces of avarice, gluttony, and lust purge affective inclinations toward goods that are false because, having seduced us with promises of full satisfaction (like the siren, who claims "sì tutto

l'appago!" [19.24]), they are not in fact capable of delivering the ultimate satisfaction—*quies*, peace, freedom from craving—that we seek. Because of their mortality, these "beni" cannot make us truly happy, cannot offer us true repose, but only more time on the treadmill of desire, the treadmill of the new: "Altro ben è che non fa l'uom felice; / non è felicità, non è la buona / essenza" ("There is another good that does not make man happy; it is not true happiness, not the good essence" [*Purg.* 17.133–35]). The desiring purged on the top three terraces is characterized by excessive abandon vis-à-vis these seductive but misleading goods: "L'amor ch'ad esso troppo s'abbandona, / di sovr'a not si piange per tre cerchi" ("The love that abandons itself too much to it is lamented above us in three circles" [*Purg.* 17.136–37]). The key word here is *troppo*, which echoes the original partition of love, capable of erring "per malo obietto / o per troppo o per poco di vigore" ("through an evil object or through too much or too little vigor" [*Purg.* 17.95–96]). The figure who stands within the *Commedia's* metaphoric system for excess, abandonment of limits, transgression, trespass—in short, for *troppo di vigore*—is Ulysses.

I am suggesting that there is a programmatic reason for the insertion of Ulysses' name into the economy of *Purgatorio* at this point. Rather than focus on the siren/*femmina balba* and the identity of the lady who rudely unveils her, I believe that we can profitably consider this passage from the vantage of its provocative and unexpected naming of Ulysses, posing the question "Why Ulysses here?"¹⁴ The siren's invocation of the Greek wayfarer serves first to remind us of what we already know, namely that he can be characterized in terms of his own false craving, the misplaced and misleading *ardore*—burning desire—that causes him to burn as a tongue of flame in hell. More importantly, the presence of Ulysses serves to characterize the desire of the top three terraces as Ulyssean, to metaphorize avarice, gluttony, and lust, so that we see these sins in the light of their root cause: excessive desire, the pursuing of objects with *troppo di vigore*. As validation of the Ulyssean thrust here conferred upon the final three terraces, we note the presence of a tree upon the terrace of gluttony whose parent is none other than the tree that Ulysses desired—metaphorically—to eat, the tree from which Adam and Eve did indeed eat: "Trapassate oltre senza farvi presso: / legno è più sù che fu morso da Eva, / e questa pianta si levò da esso" ("Pass onward without drawing near; further up is a tree that was bitten by Eve, and this plant was taken from that one" [*Purg.* 24.115–17]). This graft from the tree of knowledge enjoins the souls in Ulyssean language ("Trapassate oltre") against Ulyssean trespass ("senza farvi presso"), an injunction that is built into the tree's very shape, which is inverted so that its branches taper not toward the top but the bottom, "perché persona sù non vada" ("so that none will go up it" [*Purg.* 22.135]). A generalized interdict of this sort was uttered with respect to the

pillars of Hercules, which were placed where they are “acciò che l’uom più oltre non si metta” (“so that man will not go beyond” [*Inf.* 26.109]). And what is the root cause of *trapassare oltre*? What caused both Ulysses and Eve to ignore the interdicts they encountered? According to the analysis of human motivation provided by the second canticle, they were spurred by twisted love, by misshapen desire—by variants of the desire felt so keenly and underscored so emphatically on the terrace of gluttony, as the souls gather around the graft from the tree “that was bitten by Eve”:

Vidi gente sott’esso alzar le mani
 e gridar non so che verso le fronde,
 quasi bramosi fantolini e vani
 che pregano, e ’l pregato non risponde,
 ma, per fare esser ben la voglia acuta,
 tien alto lor disio e nol nasconde.

I saw people under it raising their hands and crying out I know
 not what toward the leaves, like avid and desiring children who
 beg, and he whom they beg does not answer but—to make their
 longing more acute—holds high the object of their desire and does
 not hide it.

(*Purg.* 24.106–11)

Dante handles gluttony in such a way as to deliteralize it; by invoking the tree of knowledge and the restraints that Eve did not tolerate he forces us to associate the sin purged on the sixth terrace with Eve’s metaphorical gluttony—her eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, her *trapassar del segno*—and thus to see gluttony in a Ulyssean light anticipated by the siren of canto 19. This expanded reading of the sins of concupiscence (for what I have said about gluttony can easily be applied to avarice and lust as well)¹⁵ is confirmed in the *Purgatorio*’s final cantos, where Beatrice’s view of the fallacy of earthly desire recalls both Augustine and the *dolce serena*: “e volse i passi suoi per via non vera, / imagini di ben seguendo false, / che nulla promession rendono intera” (“he turned his steps along a not true path, following false images of good that satisfy no promise in full” [*Purg.* 30.130–32]). The basic plot of the *Purgatorio*, like that of the *Vita Nuova*, is a courtly medieval inflection of the Augustinian paradigm whereby life—new life—is achieved by mastering the lesson of death. Because of the courtly twist, the pilgrim’s original desire for Beatrice was not in itself wrong; indeed his desire for Beatrice led him to love “the good beyond which there is nothing to aspire” (“i mie’ disiri, / che ti menavano ad amar lo bene / di là dal qual non

è a the s'aspiri" [*Purg.* 31.22–24]).¹⁶ What was wrong was his failure, after her death, to resist the siren song of the new, the *altre novità* that are false if for no other reason than that they are mortal, corruptible, confined to the present and doomed to die: "Le presenti cose / col falso lor piacer volser miei passi" ("Present things with their false pleasure turned my steps" [*Purg.* 31.34–35]).¹⁷ Having encountered the lesson of mortality once, he should not have needed to be taught it again; like Augustine after the death of his friend, he should have learned the error of "loving a man that must die as though he were not to die"—"diligendo morituum ac si non morituum" (*Conf.* 4.8). Having learned, when Beatrice died, that even the most beautiful of mortal things, the most supreme of earthly pleasures, will necessarily fail us, Dante should have known better than to ever desire another "cosa mortale": "e se 'l sommo piacer sì *ti fallio* / per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale / dovea poi trarre to nel suo disio?" ("and if the supreme pleasure thus *failed you*, with my death, what mortal thing should then have drawn you into desire?" [*Purg.* 31.52–54]). A similar theologizing of courtly topoi along Augustinian lines is already evident in the *Vita Nuova*, whose protagonist is converted from desiring Beatrice's "mortal" greeting, which fails him, to desiring only "quello che non mi puote venire meno" (18.4), a phrase that will be punctually recast in the *Purgatorio*'s "sì ti fallio." "Beatitudine," as he calls it in the *libello*, is spiritual autonomy, the ability to relinquish even the best and most beautiful of earthly things—such as Beatrice's greeting, Casella's song, Manfredi's beautiful aspect. Not the cessation of desire, but the mastery of an infallible desire, is the goal; and indeed the pilgrim enters the earthly paradise full of a questing desire ("Vago già di cercar dentro e dintorno" ["Desirous already to search inside and about" (*Purg.* 28.1)]) that cannot go wrong.

So, the paradigm of the quest remains, but the quester can no longer err. Within this conceptual node, we can identify the purgatorial valence that will be assigned to the figure of Ulysses, the shadings particular to the only canticle in which everyone is questing, in which everyone must needs fly "con l'ale snelle e con le piume / del gran disio" ("with the slender wings and with the feathers of great desire" [*Purg.* 4.28–29]). We note that the verb *volgere*, used by Beatrice to indict the pilgrim ("e volse i passi suoi per via non vera"), and then by the pilgrim as he acknowledges the legitimacy of her rebuke ("Le presenti cose . . . volser miei passi"), is the same verb used by the siren in her boast regarding Ulysses: "Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago." In fact, the Ulyssean twist that Dante gives his Augustinian thematic is made explicit by Beatrice in her summation, where she says she intends to strengthen the pilgrim in any future encounters with sirens, any future exposure to their seductive songs: "e perché altra volta, / udendo le serene, sie più forte" ("and so that another time, hearing the sirens, you may be stronger" [*Purg.* 31.44–45]).

Here we find the *Purgatorio*'s ultimate synthesis of the Ulyssean model (a man—in this case Dante—tempted by sirens) with Augustine's critique of false pleasure. Given that the sirens of verse 45 may be interpreted in the light of Cicero's *De finibus* as knowledge,¹⁸ resistance to the sirens constitutes not only resistance to the false pleasures of the flesh but also resistance to the false lure of philosophical knowledge, a lure embodied in Dante's earlier itinerary by the *donna gentile*/Lady Philosophy of the *Convivio*,¹⁹ the text that begins with the Ulyssean copula of desire and knowledge: "tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere." As the pilgrim has learned restraint before the sweet siren in all her guises, so, in the earthly paradise, the griffin is praised for having resisted the sweet taste of the tree of knowledge: "Beato se', grifon, che non discindi / col becco d'esto legno dolce al gusto, / poscia che mal si torce il ventre quindi" ("Blessed are you, griffin, who do not tear with your beak from this tree sweet to the taste, for by it the belly is evilly twisted" [*Purg.* 32.43–45]). By resisting the temptation of knowledge, the griffin refuses to challenge God's interdict (the *interdetto* of *Purgatorio* 33.71, where the tree is glossed precisely in terms of the limits it represents, the obedience it exacts, and the consequent justice of the punishment meted to those who transgress). The temptation to which Adam/Ulysses succumb is the temptation that the griffin resists.

All the threads are tied in these cantos—the threads connecting gluttony, concupiscence, pride, curiosity, questing, loving, transgressing, Ulysses, the siren, Adam, and Eve²⁰—as the Augustinian critique of misplaced desire proper to the *Purgatorio* converges with the theme of limits and transgression central to the poem as a whole, the theme embodied by Dante not only in the canonical figures of Adam and Lucifer but also in the more idiosyncratic and personal mythography of Ulysses. It is worth noting that the system of values that finds expression in the tied threads of *Purgatorio* was already, to a significant degree, present in the earlier works. We have seen that the purgatorial journey toward spiritual autonomy is adumbrated in the *Vita Nuova*; so too, the *Convivio* explores the desire for knowledge in ways that portend the *Commedia*. Let us consider, for instance, the passage in *Convivio* 4.13 where Dante compares the desire for riches to the desire for knowledge. (It should be noted that riches, *le ricchezze*, are characterized in the *Convivio* in terms that strikingly anticipate the *dolce serena* of *Purgatorio* 19, as "false traditrici" and "false meretrici" who make promises of satisfaction they cannot fulfill, and who lead not to repose but to renewed desire.)²¹ This being the *Convivio*, Dante's assessment of man's desire to know is comparatively sanguine and untroubled, and the successiveness of the desire for knowledge, with its many scaled opportunities for reaching "perfection," is sharply disjoined from the unilaterality of the desire for wealth, which leads only to increased desire:

E così appare che, dal desiderio de la scienza, la scienza non è da dire imperfetta, sì come le ricchezze sono da dire per lo loro, come la questione ponea; ché nel desiderare de la scienza successivamente finiscono li desiderii e viensi a perfezione, e in quello de la ricchezza no.

And so it appears that, on the basis of the desire for knowledge, knowledge itself is not to be called imperfect, as riches instead are to be called on the basis of the desire for riches, as the question posed; for in the desire for knowledge successively our desires conclude and come to perfection, and in desiring riches this does not happen.

(*Conv.* 4.13.5)

Similarly, in an earlier passage on desire in *Convivio* 3.15, Dante invokes the miser to explain what the seeker after knowledge is not; the miser is doomed to failure, since, by pursuing the unattainable, he desires always to desire: “e in questo errore cade l’avarò maladetto, e non s’accorge che desidera sé sempre desiderare, andando dietro al numero impossibile a giugnere” (“and into this error falls the accursed miser, and he does not realize that he desires himself always to desire, going after a number impossible to reach” [*Conv.* 3.15.9]).²² By contrast, the seeker after knowledge will satisfy his desire and fulfill his quest, in part because his quest is measured rather than gluttonously insatiable, and he realizes that there is a line he cannot cross: “E però l’umano desiderio è misurato in questa vita a quella scienza che qui avere si può, e quello punto non passa se non per errore, lo quale è di fuori di naturale intenzione” (“And so human desire is measured in this life by that knowledge which here can be had, and it does not pass that point except by error, which is outside of natural intention” [*Conv.* 3.15.9]).²³

One could describe the distance between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia* in terms of the poet’s growing concern about our Ulyssean lack of measure, our failure to respect the line that cannot be crossed, “quello punto [che l’umano desiderio] non passa se non per errore.” Even in the treatise, Dante concludes his defense of the desire for knowledge by quoting St. Paul on the need for limits: “E però Paulo dice: ‘Non più sapere che sapere si convegna, ma sapere a misura’” (“And so Paul says: ‘Do not know more than is fitting, but know with measure’” [*Conv.* 4.13.9]). Moreover, the fact that Dante sees a basis of comparison between the desire for wealth and the desire for knowledge is significant, indicating the conceptual foundation for his mature ideology of an intellectual as well as a material cupidity and pointing forward to the *Commedia*’s composite image of Ulysses on the one

hand and the wolf on the other. The *lupa* of *Inferno* 1 illuminates the negative side of the basic human condition whereby “disire è moto spiritale” and recalls Augustine’s own reduction of all desire to spiritual motion, either in the form of “charity,” desire that moves toward God, or “cupidity,” desire that remains rooted in the flesh.²⁴ As cupidity, our dark desire, the *lupa* is quintessentially without peace, “la bestia senza pace” (*Inf.* 1.58). Her restlessness and insatiability denote unceasing spiritual motion, unceasing desire: heavy “with all longings” (“di tutte brame” [49]), “her greedy craving is never filled, and after eating she is more hungry than before” (“mai non empie la bramosa voglia, / e dopo ’l pasto ha più fame che pria” [98–99]). Her limitless hunger is both caused by unsatisfied desire and creates the condition for ever less satisfaction, since, in Augustine’s words, “When vices have emptied the soul and led it to a kind of extreme hunger, it leaps into crimes by means of which impediments to the vices may be removed or the vices themselves sustained” (*De doct. Christ.* 3.10.16). When the “antica lupa” is recalled as an emblem of cupidity on purgatory’s terrace of avarice (again indicating the common ground that underlies all the sins of inordinate desire), her “hunger without end” is once more her distinguishing characteristic: “Maladetta sie tu, antica lupa, / che più che tutte l’altre bestie hai preda / per la tua fame senza fine cupa!” (“Cursed be you, ancient wolf, who more than all the other beasts have prey, because of your deep hunger without end! [*Purg.* 20.10–12]). The “antica lupa,” the “bestia senza pace” of the poem’s first canto, prepares us for *Purgatorio*’s rooting of all sin in desire and for the coupling of Ulysses, a wanderer who makes the mistake of enjoying the sights and sounds that he should merely use, with the “dolce serena”: it is impossible to separate in categorical fashion avarice from greed, greed from lust, or any of the three from desire—including the desire for knowledge—that has become immoderately transgressive, that has gone astray.²⁵

The *Convivio*’s assessment of the possibilities for human desiring is not so positive as to preclude the figure of the errant voyager. Thus, Dante offers the parable of the path that is shown and then lost (“e pongo essempro del cammino mostrato [e poscia errato]”),²⁶ a story whereby one man makes his way across an arduous and snowy plain, leaving his tracks for those behind him, only to be followed by one who is incapable even of keeping to the path laid out by his predecessor, and so loses himself: “e, per suo difetto, lo cammino, che altri senza scorta ha saputo tenere, questo scorto erra, e tortisce per li pruni e per le ruine, e a la parte dove dee non va” (“and, through his own fault, the path that another without guidance knew how to follow, this one with guidance loses, and wanders wrongly through the bushes and down the steep slopes, and to the place where he should go does not go” [*Conv.* 4.7.7]). Still, despite the Ulyssean presence of the *cammino errato*, it should be noticed

that the parable puts great emphasis on the *cammino mostrato* as well, devoting attention to the industry and skill of the guide who “per sua industria, cioè per accorgimento e per bontade d’ingegno, solo da sé guidato, per lo diritto cammino si va là dove intende, lasciando le vestigie de li suoi passi dietro da sé” (“by his own industry, by observation and the resources of intellect, guided only by himself, goes where he intended, leaving the traces of his steps behind himself” [4.7.7]). Particularly striking is the proto-Vergilian image of the tracks left for those who come behind, which anticipates the description of the Roman poet as one “che porta il lume dietro e sé non giova, / ma dopo sé fa le persone dotte” (“who carries the light behind and helps not himself, but after himself makes people wise” [*Purg.* 22.68–69]). While in the *Convivio* the guide is able to benefit from his own *industria*, the *Commedia* will recombine the parable’s elements so that the guide fails, and instead the follower benefits from the guide’s proffered help and reaches his goal. Indeed, in the poem the very idea of being able to make one’s way “per bontade d’ingegno, solo da sé guidato” will be suspect.

Even more telling than the parable of the *cammino errato* is the predictive value of our pilgrim passage from *Convivio* 4.12; here we already find the association between misdirected desire and the voyager who will never reach his goal. As we proceed from desire to desire, as our desires grow ever larger and we quest more and more insatiably for the prize that eludes us, we may deviate from the straight and truest path:²⁷

Veramente così questo cammino si perde per errore come le strade de la terra. Che sì come d’una cittade a un’altra di necessitate è una ottima e dirittissima via, e un’altra che sempre se ne dilunga (cioè quella che va ne l’altra parte), e molte altre quale meno allungandosi e quale meno appressandosi, così ne la vita umana sono diversi cammini, de li quali uno è veracissimo e un altro è fallacissimo, e certi meno fallaci e certi meno veraci. E sì come vedemo che quello che dirittissimo vae a la cittade, e compie lo desiderio e dà posa dopo la fatica, e quello che va in contrario mai nol compie e mai posa dare non può, così ne la nostra vita avviene: lo buono camminatore giugne a termine e a posa; lo erroneo mai non l’aggiugne, ma con molta fatica del suo animo sempre con li occhi gulosi si mira innanzi.

Truly thus this path is lost through error like the roads of the earth. For just as from one city to the other there is by necessity one best and straightest road, and another road that instead gets always further away (that is, which goes in another direction), and

many others of which some get further and others come nearer, so in human life there are different paths, of which one is the truest and the other the most false, and some less false and some less true. And as we see that the path that goes most directly to the city fulfills desire and gives rest after weariness, while the one that goes in the contrary direction never brings fulfillment and can never bring rest, so it happens in our life: the traveler on the right path reaches his goal and his rest; the traveler on the wrong path never reaches it, but with great weariness of soul always with his greedy eyes looks ahead.

(*Conv.* 4.12.18–19)

In the figure of the traveler on the wrong path who never reaches his goal, never fulfills his quest and his desire, never finds peace but strains forward as with “great weariness of soul always with his greedy eyes he looks ahead,” we have a full-fledged anticipation of the Ulysses figure within the *Commedia*: the *erroneo camminatore* whose greedy desire and ever forward-looking “occhi gulosi” lead him fatally to his death.²⁸ On the other hand, in the *buono camminatore* who reaches his goal and finds repose (“giugne a termine e a posa”), we find anticipated all the pilgrims of the *Commedia*, all the souls in the second realm. Given this realm’s intimate tie to the concepts of pilgrimage and voyage, it is not surprising to find at its outset a particularly lucid synthesis of the *Convivio*’s two types of voyagers.

The presence of Ulysses as mariner saturates the first canto of *Purgatorio*, from the opening image of the poem as the “little ship of my intellect,” to the closing cadenza about the deserted shore “that never saw any man navigate its waters who afterward had experience of return” (“che mai non vide navicar sue acque / omo, che di tornar sia poscia esperto” [*Purg.* 1.131–32]). No human navigator has ever seen these waters and returned to tell the tale; the pilgrim, on the other hand, looks “a l’altro polo” (“altro polo” is used only here in *Purgatorio* 1, twice, and in *Inferno* 26) and sees “quattro stelle / non viste mai fuor ch’a la prima gente” (“four stars never seen save by the first people” [23–24]). How can it be that, in the course of Ulysses’ journey, “the night saw *all* the stars already of the other pole” (“*Tutte* le stelle già de l’altro polo / vedea la notte” [*Inf.* 26.127–28]), while now the other pole shows the pilgrim four stars that no one has seen since Adam and Eve? Whether the contradiction is meant to indicate the purely symbolic nature of these four purgatorial stars,²⁹ or whether the night somehow saw what Ulysses himself did not see, the dialectic between vision denied and vision vouchsafed is essential to this canto, whose themes of castigated pride and potentially broken laws (“Son le leggi d’abisso così rotte?” [“Are the laws of the abyss so broken?”] asks Cato in

line 46) link it to its predecessor, *Inferno* 34, as surely as its style and tonality disjoin it. In the same way, the pilgrim—of whose previous *folia* Vergil speaks in what the poem has coded as a Ulyssean lexicon—is purposely linked to the Greek sailor, only to be just as purposely disjoined: although his backward descent to the base of the mountain makes him appear a man who travels in vain until he returns to the road he has lost (“com’om che torna a la perduta strada, / che ’nfinò ad essa li pare ire in vano” [119–20]), in fact this backward motion will serve to dissociate him from Ulyssean pride, bringing him to the reeds of rebirth rather than to the “perduta strada” of hell.³⁰

Throughout these opening cantos of *Purgatorio* recur the images of travel: Dante and Vergil are “come gente che pensa a suo cammino, / che va col cuore e col corpo dimora” (“like people who think of their path, who go in heart and remain in body” [*Purg.* 2.11–12]); the souls dispersed by Cato move off toward the mountain’s slope “com’om che va, né sa dove rïesca” (“like a man who goes, nor knows where he may come forth” [*Purg.* 2.132]). Throughout these cantos, also, runs the leitmotif of limits, of the non-Ulyssean humility that distinguishes our travelers from the *erroneo camminatore*. The newly arrived souls of purgatory are “rustic” (“selvaggia” [*Purg.* 2.52]) rather than “urbanely” self-confident;³¹ not being “esperti d’esto loco,” they look around “come colui che nove cose assaggia” (“like one who tastes new things” [*Purg.* 2.54]). In contrast to Ulysses, who sought to conquer the *nova terra*, to make it no longer new, these souls accept their status as “nova gente” (*Purg.* 2.58). In contrast to Ulysses, who in trying to reach purgatory was striving to be a new thing in the sense of something not envisioned by God, something not written into the divine script (the periphrasis for the shore, “che mai non vide navicar sue acque,” anticipates the periphrasis for God, “Colui che mai non vide cosa nova”), these souls are new things in the sense that they will be made new, will be “remade like new plants, renewed with new leaf” at the canticle’s end. Like the souls, the pilgrim too is God’s “cosa nova”: not an attempt to abrogate the laws and surprise God but a sign of God’s providence, as Sapia indicates when she exclaims that the pilgrim’s journey is “sì cosa nuova . . . che gran segno è che Dio t’ami” (“such a new thing that it is a great sign that God loves you” [*Purg.* 13.145–46]).³² This contrast is sustained in canto 3 through Vergil’s discourse on human intellectual limits (“State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*” [“Content yourselves, human folk, with the fact that certain things are” (*Purg.* 3.37)]), through the description of the purgatorial souls as timid sheep, who are content to act without knowing the reason why (“e lo ’mperché non sanno” [84]), and finally through the temporal ban—the “divieto” of verse 144—that punishes the “presumption” (“presunzion” [140]) of those who die excommunicate. In canto 4 we learn that to scale purgatory we must fly with the wings of great desire and then find contrasted the immoderate zeal of

Phaeton's flight with the immoderate torpor of the negligent Belacqua;³³ at the same time, there is also the suggestion that Belacqua's negligence partakes of humility and might have something to teach the pilgrim, who—unlike Phaeton—will have to accept his limitations before climbing to the top of this mountain. Belacqua's friendly taunt, "Forse / che di sedere in pria avrai distretta!" ("Maybe before then you'll need to sit!" [*Purg.* 4.98–99]), will be picked up by Sordello's sterner reminder of limits—"sola questa riga / non varcheresti dopo 'l sol partito" ("not even this line would you cross after the sun's departure" [*Purg.* 7.53–54]), where the use of the verb *varcare* carries a Ulyssean reverberation.

In the *Purgatorio*, then, Dante takes great pains to establish the paradigm of the *erroneo camminatore* versus the *buono camminatore* and to associate the pilgrim with the latter. He sets up an implied model, a scale that measures various approaches to the divine and indicates the wide range of right movement, of acceptable—non-Ulyssean—flight. But, in a text whose fiction is that it is no fiction, and whose strategy is that there is no strategy, the matter is never so simple. Thus, in canto 3, the theme of human limits is allowed to embrace the ecclesiastical establishment, up to and including the pope: had the bishop of Cosenza, instructed to hunt Manfredi by Clement IV, been able to "read" the face of God that is his infinite mercy ("avesse in Dio ben letta questa faccia" [*Purg.* 3.126]), Manfredi's bones would not have been disinterred. The bishop, and with him his superior, was proved incapable of "reading," understanding and interpreting, the divine will.³⁴ In the same way, in canto 5, the mystery of divine predestination will baffle not only human agents, like the pope, but a devil, who will be infuriated by the inexplicable intervention of an angel on Bonconte's behalf: "lo dirò vero, e lo 'l ridì tra' vivi: / l'angel di Dio mi prese, e quel d'inferno / gridava: 'O to del ciel, perché mi privi?'" ("I will tell the truth, and you retell it among the living: the angel of God took me, and the one from hell cried, 'O you from heaven, why do you deprive me?'" [*Purg.* 5.103–5]). What Bonconte recounts cannot be logically explained or comprehended, since it belongs to the mystery of providence; it must be accepted on faith, as the truth: "lo dirò vero," says Bonconte. And, indeed, it must be the "truth," or else Dante would not be sanctioning what Bonconte said to him ("e tu 'l ridì tra' vivi"), or else—in fact—Bonconte would not be where he is, in purgatory. In this fiction a soul, in this case Bonconte, tells the pilgrim that he is telling the truth; the poet repeats what the soul "said" to the pilgrim, along with the injunction to repeat it, and thereby presents it as the truth rather than as fiction. Ultimately, however, the fiction is a fiction, no matter how skillfully deployed, and the choice to save Manfredi, thereby branding the pope an incompetent reader of the divine text, like the choice to save Bonconte, is Dante's. Thus we come back to the

word *presunzione* inscribed into the conclusion of canto 3: whose presumption is really at stake here, if not the poet's? The textual language employed in these episodes—not only the failure to read but also calling the Archiano's convergence with the Arno the place where the river loses its name, where its signifier is emptied of significance, "Là 've 'l vocabol suo diventa vano" (*Purg.* 5.97)—serves to highlight the metatextual implications: does Dante read God correctly, as he claims, or does he read like Clement, composing a text whose *vocaboli* are therefore *vani*?

I submit that the terms *presunzione* and *presumere* may be said to carry a Ulyssean charge in all Dante's works, that indeed they were invested by Dante with a special significance as early as the *Convivio* and the *De vulgari eloquentia*, before such a thematic could properly be dubbed "Ulyssean."³⁵ In other words, Dante has a history of using these words in contexts that indicate his ongoing concern with the problem of intellectual arrogance, the problem to which in the *Commedia* he gives dramatic and poetic shape with the figure of Ulysses. In the *De vulgari eloquentia* we find the first and programmatic use of the adjective as a qualifier for Eve, *presumptuosissima Eva*, who, in replying to the devil, became the first human to speak (1.4.2).³⁶ The sin of human presumption ("culpa presumptionis humane" [1.6.4]) leads to mankind's "third" fall; following the expulsion from the garden of Eden and the flood, in our foolish pride we presume yet a third time: "per superbam stultitiam presumendo" (1.7.3). The participle "presumendo" is immediately picked up by the next word, "Presumpsit," which powerfully begins the paragraph dedicated to the discussion of the linguistic diaspora occasioned by Nimrod's hubristic attempt to construct the tower of Babel: "Presumpsit ergo in corde suo incurabilis homo, sub persuasione gigantis Nembroth, arte sua non solum superare naturam, sed etiam ipsum naturantem, qui Deus est" ("So incurable man, persuaded by the giant Nimrod, presumed in his heart to surpass with his art not only nature, but also nature's maker, who is God" [1.7.4]). The connection between pride and human endeavor—human "art" as it is called here and in a related passage in *Inferno* 11³⁷—is a striking feature of this passage, and one that anticipates the *Commedia*; Nimrod's attempt to surpass not only nature but nature's maker will cause him to be remembered in each canticle of the poem, as part of an "artistic" constellation that also includes Ulysses and Phaeton.³⁸ Not surprisingly, then, in the *Commedia* *presumere* is invested with enormous self-consciousness; on both occasions in which Dante employs the verb (the noun occurs only in *Purgatorio* 3), he is referring to himself.³⁹ It appears in *Paradiso* 33, in the supreme moment of the pilgrim's nontransgressive transgression, where the verb's prideful connotations are redeemed through the grace of God: "Oh abbondante grazia ond'io presunsi / ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna" ("O abundant grace whereby I presumed to thrust

my face through the eternal light" [82–83]). If the point here is the legitimate presumption that propels us toward our maker, the poem's other usage recoups its previous history in Dante's works; in answer to the pilgrim's query as to why Peter Damian alone was predestined to welcome him to the heaven of Saturn, the saint replies that the mystery of predestination is hidden in the abyss of God's will and that human beings should not presume to tackle such a question: "E al mondo mortal, quando tu riedi, / questo rapporta, sì che non presumma / a tanto segno più mover li piedi" ("And to the mortal world, when you return, bring back this message, so that it will not any longer presume to move its feet toward such a goal" [*Par.* 21.97–99]).

Here the poet advises himself, through the medium of Peter Damian, to advise the world not to seek presumptuously to know what cannot be known; like the passage in *Paradiso* 13 in which Dante, the great judge, condemns hasty judgments through the agency of St. Thomas, this passage betrays a protective awareness of the *Commedia's* own Achilles' heel. As a self-proclaimed prophecy, the *Commedia* is a text whose basic program of revealing the state of souls after death participates in the very presumption it is supposed to warn the world against. Indeed, the *Commedia's* only defense against such presumption is its aggressive assumption of the mantle of truth, its vigilant assertions that it is a true prophecy, vouchsafed by God in a vision. Dante is aware that he is only preserved from presumption by the divine investiture that he alone knows he received, and that only his ability to persuade us of this investiture's historicity (or of his sincerity in claiming its historicity) prevents us from considering him fraudulently self-deluded and self-promoting: as self-deluded and self-promoting as, for instance, the false prophets of *Inferno* 20, or the mendacious preachers of *Paradiso* 29.⁴⁰ This awareness dictates both the connection between artistry and pride that runs through his work and the (defensive) aggression he directs at any others—like the false prophets and the lying preachers—whose art it also is to present themselves as tellers of truth. This aggression toward rival claimants was first directed, in the course of Dante's career, against poets whose pretensions surpassed their abilities. Thus, when, in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante condemns the Tuscan poets for their mad arrogance, he uses language that anticipates the *Commedia's* lexicon of Ulyssean hubris;⁴¹ the key word, *praesumptuositas*, used in adjectival form earlier in the treatise for Eve, now describes poets who try to go beyond their natural limits. They should desist from such presumption, and if nature or laziness has made them ducks, they should accept their lowly status (likewise Nimrod should have accepted the low position of human art in the mimetic hierarchy) and cease to imitate the star-seeking eagle: "et a tanta presumptuositate desistant, et si anseres natura vel desidria sunt, nolint astripetam aquilam imitari" (2.4.11). Poets like Guittone d'Arezzo, in other

words, should not seek to imitate supreme poets, poets who seek the stars, poets like Dante; their (false) claims to tell truth should not interfere with his (true) claims.⁴² The question of presumption is thus intimately connected to the question of access to truth, as Peter Damian tells us in the *Commedia* and as Dante had already clarified in this passage from the *Convivio*:

ché sono molti tanto presuntuosi, che si credono tutto sapere, e per questo le non certe cose affermano per certe; lo qual vizio Tullio massimamente abomina nel primo de li Offici e Tommaso nel suo *Contra li Gentili*, dicendo: “Sono molti tanto di suo ingegno presuntuosi, che credono col suo intelletto poter misurare tutte le cose, *estimando tutto vero quello che a loro pare, falso quello che a loro non pare.*”

for there are many who are so presumptuous that they think they know everything, and on this basis they treat matters that are not certain as certain; which vice Cicero greatly abominates in the first book of the *De officiis* and Thomas in his *Contra gentiles* saying: “There are many so presumptuous in their intelligence that they think with their minds to be able to measure all things, *believing everything to be true which seems to them to be true, and false that which seems to them false.*”

(*Conv.* 4.15.12)

The *Convivio* foreshadows the dialectical bind in which the author of the *Commedia* is caught, as he either ferociously condemns those who fail to accept their limits⁴³ or wards off the possibility that he himself may not be accepting his limits, that the authority of his authorship may cause him to transgress against other authorities: “È prima mostrerò me non presumere [contra l'autorità del Filosofo; poi mostrerò me non presumere] contra la maiestade imperiale” (“And first I will demonstrate that I have not presumed [against the authority of the Philosopher; then I will show that I have not presumed] against the imperial majesty” [*Conv.* 4.8.5]).⁴⁴ Looking again at the episode in *Paradiso* 21 where Peter Damian denounces the pilgrim's curiosity regarding predestination, we note that the pilgrim beats a retreat from his daring original query to the humbler “Who are you?": “Sì mi prescisser le parole sue, / ch'io lasciai la quistione e mi ritrassi / a dimandarla umilmente chi fue” (“So did his words impose a limit that I left the question and drew back to asking humbly who he was” [*Par.* 21.103–5]).⁴⁵ But the episode gives us a counter signal as well, in the form of the rhyme words *abisso* and *scisso*, which send us back to one of the most daringly transgressive passages in the poem

and remind us that the pilgrim's retreat cannot be simplistically equated with the poet's. Peter Damian tells the pilgrim that the seraph whose eyes are most fixed on God would not be able to answer his question, "for what you ask is so far advanced in the abyss of the eternal decree that from every created vision it is cut off": "però che sì s'innoltra ne lo *abisso* / de l'eterno statuto quel che chiedi, / che da ogne creata vista è *scisso*" (*Par.* 21.94–96). This same rhyme occurs elsewhere only in *Purgatorio* 6, where *abisso* also refers to the inscrutability of the divine will ("abisso / del tuo consiglio" as compared to "abisso / de l'eterno statuto"), where our awareness is also cut off—"scisso"—from understanding, and where the recollection of our eternal shortsightedness follows a query, addressed to God, of enormous presumption:

E se licito m'è, o sommo Giove
che fosti in terra per noi crucifisso,
son li giusti occhi tuoi rivolti altrove?
O è preparazion che ne l'*abisso*
del tuo consiglio fai per alcun bene
in tutto de l'accorger nostro *scisso*?

And if it be lawful for me, o supreme Jove who was crucified
for us on earth, are your just eyes turned elsewhere? Or is it a
preparation that in the *abyss* of your counsel you make for some
good that is completely *cut off* from our perception?
(*Purg.* 6.118–23)

The new and never before traveled path of this poem entails bizarre reversals: on the one hand, we have a poet who invents a special penalty to castigate the presumption of anyone who challenges the authority of the church, a temporal ban ("divieto") of thirtyfold the amount of time passed by such a soul "in sua presunzion"; on the other hand, this same poet presumes to ostentatiously include in the community of the saved, by his own—that is, "God's"—fiat, a soul who was notoriously cast out by one of God's chosen vicars. And, were questioning a pope not problematic enough, this poet presumes to question God himself, wondering all the while if it is licit so to do—"se licito m'è"—because he knows perfectly well that it is not.⁴⁶

Purgatorio 6 is a canto in which the narrator steps out of bounds—both ideologically, in the lengthy invective that escalates into the questioning of divine justice, and narratologically, in that the invective is couched in the form of a digression: a literal swerving away from the narrative confines and off the narrative path. Ideological *transgressio* thus elicits narratological *digressio*.⁴⁷ Beginning in verse 76, the digression finds its pretext in the civic embrace of

Vergil and Sordello and preempts the rest of canto 6; not until canto 7 does the interrupted encounter between the two Mantuan poets resume (the willed and programmatic nature of the interruption is further emphasized by its coincidence with the canto break).⁴⁸ There are signs of the coming disruption in the first part of the canto: the narrator has already slipped out of harness in lines 22–24, when he suggests to the still living Marie de Brabant that she begin to provide for her immortal soul;⁴⁹ the encounter with Sordello also elicits a brief apostrophe that momentarily arrests the narrative flow in midverse: “Venimmo a lei: o anima lombarda, / come ti stavi altera e disdegnosa” (“We came to him; O Lombard soul, how you were proud and disdainful” [*Purg.* 6.61–62]). Of particular importance is the attack on the integrity of Vergil’s text that is staged between lines 28 and 48: the poet has the pilgrim wonder why it is that in the *Aeneid* prayer does not help Palinurus to cross the Acheron, while in purgatory prayer is a force for spiritual advancement; Vergil is forced to confront the fact that he was writing about souls whose prayers are disjoined from God, while the pilgrim is experiencing the requests of souls whose prayers have access to divine justice. In Vergil’s murky explanation (the fact that he tells us that his text is clear on this point, “La mia scrittura è piana” [34], only highlights the obscurity of his gloss), the justice that will so exercise the poet later on in this canto is already present: “ché cima di giudicio non s’avvalla / perché foco d’amor compia in un punto / ciò che de’ sodisfar chi qui s’astalla” (“for the summit of judgment is not lowered because the fire of love fulfills in one moment that which he who stays here must satisfy” [37–39]). Vergil has thus already posed, indirectly, the question of how justice can be bent by love without ceasing to be just (or how, by implication, it can fail to be bent by love without ceasing to be just).⁵⁰ He further anticipates the poet by inserting into his address a little authorial signpost: Vergil’s “se ben si guarda con la mente sana” (“if with sound mind you consider well” [36]) will be echoed in the course of the digression by the poet’s own “se bene intendi ciò che Dio ti nota” (“if you understand well what God tells you” [93]). These anticipations serve to underscore the disjunction between Vergil and Dante, *Aeneid* and *Commedia*. Prior to his great invective, an invective that is licit—if indeed it is, *se licito m’è*—precisely because he is one who interprets God’s notations correctly, the poet stretches a textual cord on between his text and the *Aeneid*, confirming the latter in its errors and thus creating the space, the liminality, in which the *Commedia* can receive its mandate for prophetic transgression, for the literal trespass of the sign (“trapassar del segno”) that is his “digression.”

In the *Commedia* Dante uses the terms *digressione* and *digredire* only twice, on both occasions to usher in a full-fledged change in subject matter:⁵¹ in *Purgatorio* 6 he uses the noun, congratulating Florence on “questa digression che non ti tocca” (“this digression that does not touch you” [128]); while in

Paradiso 29 the poet concludes the invective against fraudulent preachers by announcing that it is time for us to turn our eyes back to the straight road (in this case, the straight road, the narrative path, is a discussion of the nature of angels), since we have digressed enough (“Ma perché siam digressi assai, ritorci / li occhi oramai verso la dritta strada” [127–28]). If we consider that the brunt of *Paradiso* 29’s critique is that there exist unscrupulous preachers who tell falsehoods, inventions, and lies, we begin to discern the consonance between the poem’s two self-proclaimed digressions: they are both metatextual moments, concerned with situating the text from which they pretend to depart with respect to other texts; in a word, far from being extraneous, they are integrally connected to Dante’s campaign to be seen as a teller of truth. In his condemnation of false preachers, Dante’s strategy is the fairly straightforward attack on other pretenders that we have already noted to be a staple of his career. The invective of *Purgatorio* 6, on the other hand, offers the more delicate dialectic between the author’s awareness of his own potential for transgression and the express declaration of his status as a teller of truth, one whose words are corroborated by events, by history itself: “S’io dico ’l ver, l’effetto nol nasconde” (“If I tell the truth, the facts do not hide it” [*Purg.* 6.138]). The truly remarkable nature of the rupture in *Purgatorio* 6, moreover, is suggested by the steps that Dante takes to restore the fictive status quo that he has so emphatically sundered. In canto 7 Sordello will guide the pilgrim to the valley of the princes, showing him its denizens, in the same way that in canto 6 the poet offers to guide the emperor, exhorting him to “look” at what he has to show in the thrice repeated formula, “Vieni a veder” (“Come to see”);⁵² as the poet apostrophizes Albert I of Austria, accusing him of abandoning the garden of the empire, so Sordello notes that Albert’s father, Rudolf I, could have healed the wounds that have been the death of Italy. Sordello might almost be said to “imitate” the poet, self-consciously drawing attention to his narrative role as Dante did in the digression: “Anche al nasuto vanno mie parole / non men ch’a l’altro” (“My words apply to the large-nosed one no less than to the other” [*Purg.* 7.124–25]). However, when Sordello echoes the poet in his use of “licito,” it is not to suggest the possibility of transgression but rather the need to accept one’s limits: “licito m’è andar suso e intorno; / per quanto ir posso, a guida mi t’accosto” (“it is permitted me to go up and around; as far as I am able, I will accompany you as guide” [*Purg.* 7.41–42]).

Sordello restores narrative normalcy and ideological humility, leading us back within the limits, both narratologically and theologically. Rather than attend to the unveiled voice of the poet, we once more learn our lessons at the hands of a figure within the fictive construct, one, moreover, who does not question the workings of providence: thus Sordello explains that if nobility is rarely passed on from father to son, it is because God wills it so (*Purg.* 7.121–23).

Another figure within the fictive construct, Nino Visconti, refers to the mysteries of providence in a periphrasis that wonderfully literalizes the limits to our mental voyaging: God is “the one who so hides his first cause that there is no fording thereto” (“colui che sì nasconde / lo suo primo perché, che non li è guado” [*Purg.* 8.68–69]). Nino is drawing attention to the singular grace that has brought the pilgrim to purgatory while alive, a grace that he effectively posits as the only answer to the poet’s anguished query of canto 6; the text’s reply to its author’s “Vieni a veder” is Nino’s echoing call to Currado to “come and see what God willed in his grace”: “vieni a veder che Dio per grazia volse” (*Purg.* 8.66). And so we are folded back within the fiction; so *di-gressio*, trespass without the bounds, is channeled within, becoming the “trapassar dentro” of the author’s address to the reader in canto 8: “Aguzza qui, lettor, ben li occhi al vero, / chè ’l velo è ora ben tanto sottile, / certo che ’l trapassar dentro è leggero” (“Reader, here sharpen well your eyes to the truth, for the veil is now so thin that certainly to pass within is easy” [19–21]). The digression has been righted by the restoration of the fiction (somewhat “thinner” than usual, perhaps, as a result of the preceding rupture): truth is under the veil, within the fiction, not only outside it, in the space of digression. And yet, finally, is not the fiction more transgressive than that which it corrects? What is more transgressive than Nino’s call, when we consider that the object of God’s grace whom Currado is summoned to see is none other than our author? The poet addresses us again, in canto 9, to alert us to the exalted nature of his theme and therefore of his art: “Lettor, tu vedi ben com’io innalzo / la mia materia, e però con più arte / non ti maravigliar s’io la rinalzo” (“Reader, you see well how I raise my matter, and therefore do not marvel if with more art I sustain it” [70–72]). The episode that follows is not known for its linguistic or poetic virtuosity, for its hold on the reader or its dramatic power; indeed, the description of the ritual encounter with the angel at purgatory’s gate would hardly seem to qualify as an example of “più arte.” To the extent, however, that art is measured by its access to truth, this passage may indeed be of the “highest,” if, as Armour claims, it constitutes a supreme example of figural polysemy.⁵³ Apparently simple writing may not be so simple, may even be “exalted,” if the literal veil covers not a fictitious truth, a metaphorical truth, but the actual—incarnate—truth. If the fiction tells truth then the retreat from the trespass of the digression is in fact not a retreat but an advance. The implications of the digression, with respect to *praesumptuositas*, are thus more intact than ever, as we—and the poet—approach the terrace of pride.

NOTES

1. For the basic narrative structure of each terrace and the variations applied to it, see Enrico De’Negri, “Tema e iconografia del *Purgatorio*,” *Romanic Review* 49 (1958): 81–104.

2. Michelangelo Picone writes a brief history of the pilgrimage metaphor in *Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza* (Padua: Liviana, 1979); see chapter 5, "Peregrinus amoris: la metafora finale," where he concludes his resume with this passage from the *Convivio*, in which the metaphor is presented "al massimo delle sue potenzialità espressive" (152). The importance of this passage for the *Commedia* is noted by Bruno Basile, "Il viaggio come archetipo: note sul tema della 'peregrinatio' in Dante," *Lettere classensi* 15 (1986): 9–26.

3. The typology of Exodus, of pilgrimage, is further signaled by the psalm, "In exitu Israel de Aegypto" in *Purg.* 2. As Peter Armour explains, this typology applies in a unique way to purgatory: "the *Inferno* and the *Paradiso* do not actually refer to the Exodus, for the souls there are not going anywhere"; "the path of purification is a single, continuous road to be started in this life and completed in the next" ("The Theme of Exodus in the First Two Cantos of the *Purgatorio*," *Dante Soundings*, ed. David Nolan [Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981], 59–99; quotations, 77, 79). Pilgrimage motifs in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia* are treated by Julia Bolton Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), chapter 3, and John G. Demaray, *Dante and the Book of the Cosmos* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1987).

4. Giovanni Cecchetti uses the happy expression "nostalgia del futuro" to describe the condition of the souls in purgatory in "Il peregrin e i navicanti di *Purgatorio*, VIII, 1–6: saggio di lettura dantesca," *A Dante Symposium in Commemoration of the 700th Anniversary of the Poet's Birth*, ed. W. De Sua and G. Rizzo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 159–74; quotation, 168. I disagree with Cecchetti's insistence that nostalgia for the past is completely absent from the verses at the beginning of *Purg.* 8, and from the *Purgatorio* in general; the poetic tension of the second canticle, carefully manipulated by the poet, is generated from the interplay between the souls' double nostalgia. They do, as Cecchetti says, want to return home, but they are not yet completely sure where home is.

5. The importance of the verse "dove tempo per tempo si ristora" is discussed by Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 72, and by me in *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy"* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 46–47. See also Luigi Blasucci, "La dimensione del tempo nel *Purgatorio*," *Studi su Dante e Ariosto* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1969), 37–64, and Franco Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo nella "Commedia"* (Ravenna: Longo, 1976), chapter 5.

6. A balanced discussion of Augustine's role in the works of both Dante and Petrarch is provided by Carlo Calcaterra, *Nella selva del Petrarca* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1942). Recently, Augustine's absence from the *Commedia* has been taken up by Peter S. Hawkins, "Divide and Conquer: Augustine in the *Divine Comedy*," *PMLA* 106 (1991): 471–82. Hawkins focuses on the intertextual presence of Augustine in Vergil's discourse of *Purg.* 15. Interestingly, he too concentrates on a purgatorial presence, which he also sees as mediated through a substitute figure, who in his more political reading is Vergil.

7. The passage from the *Enchiridion* is cited by Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (1981; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 71. Le Goff does not relate Augustine's analysis to Dante's purgatory; in fact, his chapter on Dante, the weakest in the book, makes very little use of the material that his own previous chapters provide.

8. See above, chapter 2, for Beatrice as a *cosa nova*. In his edition, Petrocchi supports “*novità nel senso di ‘giovanile esperienza,’ ‘immatura passione,’ o magari ‘altra passione per donna giovine’*” (*La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata* 3:538). While these meanings are certainly legitimate, I think this passage provides a key example of the benefits of taking Dante’s use of *novo* more literally, as in “nuovo e mai non fatto.” *Purgatorio* 10’s periphrasis for God as “Colui che mai non vide cosa nova” is also profoundly Augustinian, considering Augustine’s struggle to “dismiss any idea of ‘newness’ in the will of God” (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer [1983; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 26).

9. “Some things are to be enjoyed, others to be used, and there are others which are to be enjoyed and used. Those things which are to be enjoyed make us blessed. Those things which are to be used help and, as it were, sustain us as we move toward blessedness” (*On Christian Doctrine* 1.3.3; trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958], 9).

10. *Confessions* 10.31: “But the snare of concupiscence awaits me in the very process of passing from the discomfort of hunger to the contentment which comes when it is satisfied” (trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin [London: Penguin, 1961]). The Latin is from the Loeb edition, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1977).

11. Voyage imagery to describe the unfolding of the human soul is also found in *Purg.* 25; a human fetus is still in transit when a plant has already arrived: “questa è in via e quella è già a riva” (54).

12. Points of contact between authors frequently spell out their divergences as well, and it should be noted that Dante’s beautiful image of the newborn soul as a little girl, “che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia” (*Purg.* 16.87), expresses a relative innocence that is certainly not Augustinian. Indeed, the very passage in *Confessions* 1.19 cited above begins with a disclaimer of the innocence of childhood.

13. Giorgio Padoan brings together Augustine and Dante’s Ulysses in “Ulysses ‘fandi fictor’ e le vie della sapienza,” 1960, rpt. in *Il pio Enea, l’empio Ulisse* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 170–204; drawing attention to the medieval tradition whereby wandering at sea signifies the soul’s inclination toward false goods, Padoan cites, among other texts, a passage from Augustine’s *De beata vita* (181–84). John Freccero points to resemblances between Augustine’s allegory of voyage and *Inf.* 26 in “The Prologue Scene,” 1966, rpt. in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), esp. 20–23.

14. Robert Hollander’s reading, which leads to the conclusion that “Ulysses was precisely such a sailor; Dante is so no longer,” is representative of a prevalent approach toward this episode, whereby the siren and Ulysses are situated within the poem’s moral allegory but the question of their local significance, of why Ulysses is invoked here, is never really posed. See “*Purgatorio* XIX: Dante’s Siren/Harpy,” in *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honor of Charles S. Singleton*, ed. Aldo S. Bernardo and Anthony L. Pellegrini (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983), 77–88; quotation, 86.

15. Petrarch engages in a metaphorically expanded reading of the sins of concupiscence in his Augustinian *Secretum*, where he treats ambition and the desire for glory as forms of avarice.

16. Augustine does not conceive of erotic objects of desire as vehicles toward God, a fact that Petrarch (more attuned to the historical Augustine than Dante)

dramatizes in the *Secretum*: the Augustinus figure consistently refutes Franciscus's courtly rationalizations of his love for Laura as a path toward virtue.

17. Dante's use of *falso* as qualifier for *piacer* recalls Augustine's invocation of God as "dulcedo non fallax, dulcedo felix et secura" in *Confessions* 2.1.

18. "It is knowledge that the Sirens offer, and it was no marvel if a lover of wisdom held this dearer than his home" (*De fin.* 5.18; trans. H. Rackham [Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1971]). The *De finibus* is brought to bear on Dante's sirens by Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "The 'Sirens' of *Purgatorio* XXXI, 45," *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's Comedy* (1960; rpt., New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), who shows that the two terms of Beatrice's rebuke (the sirens of 31.45 and the *pargoletta* of 31.59) stand "for the temptations of the mind as well as the temptations of the flesh" (209). For the literary and autobiographical implications of the *pargoletta* qua temptation of the flesh, see Sara Sturm-Maddox, "The Rime *Petrose* and the Purgatorial Palinode," *Studies in Philology* 84 (1987): 119–33.

19. The connection between the siren of *Purg.* 19 and Lady Philosophy is elaborated by Colin Hardie, "*Purgatorio* XIX: The Dream of the Siren," *Lecture del "Purgatorio"*, ed. Vittorio Vettori (Milan: Marzorati, 1965), 217–19.

20. Among the threads that are tied is the one linking Dante's two key sins: *superbia* (the crucial sin in the private sphere) and *cupidigia* (the crucial sin in the public sphere) are both forms of *il trapassar del segno*. Hardie stipulates, I believe correctly, that the siren "should turn out to be complex and comprehensive": "She should personify the whole range of seven [sins], just as the sin of Adam can be shown to include elements of the whole gamut from *superbia* to *luxuria*" ("*Purgatorio* XIX," 236–37).

21. See *Convivio* 4.12, and note the adjective *nuovo*, always part of Dante's discourse of desire: "Promettono le false traditrici sempre, in certo numero adunate, rendere lo raunatore pieno d'ogni appagamento; e con questa promissione conducono l'umana voluntade in vizio d'avarizia. . . . Promettono le false traditrici, se bene si guarda, di torre ogni sete e ogni mancanza, e apportare ogni saziamento e bastanza; e questo fanno nel principio a ciascuno uomo, questa promissione in certa quantità di loro accrescimento affermando: e poi che quivi sono adunate, in loco di saziamento e di refrigerio danno e recano sete di casso febricante intollerabile; e in loco di bastanza recano *nuovo termine*, cioè maggiore quantitate a desiderio e, con questa, paura grande e sollicitudine sopra l'acquisto. Sì che veramente non quietano, ma più danno cura, la qual prima senza loro non si avea" (4–5). Referring generically to "quanto la verace Scrittura divina chiama contra queste false meretrici" (8), Dante underlines the social ills caused by a desire that can never be satisfied, that is always new: "E che altro cotidianamente pericola e uccide le cittadi, le contrade, le singolari persone, tanto quanto *lo nuovo raunamento* d'aver appo alcuno? Lo quale raunamento *nuovi desiderii* discuopre, a lo fine de li quali senza ingiuria d'alcuno venire non si può" (9).

22. The *Convivio's* *avaro maladetto* also figures in the fourth strophe of the canzone "Doglia mi reca," where Dante writes of a miser who follows a "dolorosa strada," and to whom the pursuit of gain will bring no peace (note the Ulyssean cast to the lexicon, e.g., "folle volere"):

Corre l'avaro, ma più fugge pace:
oh mente cieca, che non pò vedere

lo suo folle volere
 che 'l numero, ch'ognora a passar bada,
 che 'nfinito vaneggia.

The miser is cursed for having desired what can only be desired in vain, for having hungered without finding satisfaction, for having accomplished nothing:

dimmi, che hai tu fatto,
 cieco avaro disfatto?
 Rispondimi, se puoi, altro che "Nulla."
 Maladetta tua culla,
 che lusingò cotanti sonni invano;
 maladetto lo tuo perduto pane,
 che non si perde al cane:
 ché da sera e da mane
 hai raunato e stretto ad ambo mano
 ciò che sì tosto si rifà lontano.

For the importance of this canzone in forecasting the moral basis of the *Commedia*, see my "Dante and the Lyric Past," *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

23. On *Convivio* 3.15's assessment of the desire for knowledge, in comparison to that of St. Thomas, see Bruno Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia": Sei saggi danteschi* (Rome: Istituto Storico per il Medio Evo, 1960), 66–75. In *La felicità mentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), Maria Corti makes too much of the alleged theological orthodoxy of the treatise's fourth book in comparison to its predecessors, basing herself in part on the issue of the desire for knowledge. The distance between *Convivio* and *Commedia* on this topic remains much more striking than the distance between *Convivio* 3 and *Convivio* 4.

24. "I call 'charity' the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God; but 'cupidity' is a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one's self, one's neighbor, or any corporal thing for the sake of something other than God" (*On Christian Doctrine* 3.10.16).

25. Anthony K. Cassell makes the point that the "*lupa* suggests something including, yet more encompassing than, the fully realized sin of *avaritia* or *cupiditas* in its extreme manifestations: the wolf represents the temptation of the sins of incontinence or concupiscence in the broadest sense" ("*Inferno*" I, *Lectura Dantis Americana* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989], 68).

26. For this passage I have followed the edition of G. Busnelli and G. Vandelli (2d ed., rev. A. E. Quaglio, 2 vols. [Florence: Le Monnier, 1964]), in order to use their bracketed emendation. In his edition Cesare Vasoli comments that "Busnelli e Vandelli aggiungono [*e poscia errato*], richiamandosi al testo della canzone ('cui è scorto il cammino e poscia l'erra'). Ma l'aggiunta non sembra indispensabile" (598).

27. Despite the fact that men take different paths ("ché l'uno tiene uno cammino e l'altro un altro"), there is only one true path: "Sì come dice l'Apostolo: 'Molti corrono al palio, ma uno è quelli che 'l prende,' così questi umani appetiti per diversi calli dal principio se ne vanno, e uno solo calle e quello che noi mena a la nostra pace" (*Conv.* 4.22.6).

28. The theme of “occhi gulosi” is recalled in the pilgrim’s own *occhi vaghi* of *Purg.* 10 (“ch’a mirare eran contenti / per veder novitadi ond’e’ son vaghi” [103–4]), which echo an earlier passage where his *mente* is similarly *vaga*, desirous of new sights: “la mente mia, che prima era ristretta, / lo ’ntento rallargò, sì come vaga” (*Purg.* 3.12–14).

29. This is Charles Singleton’s position in *Journey to Beatrice* (1958; rpt., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 141–203; he mentions Ulysses as one who may have seen the stars (147) but does not elaborate.

30. Backward motion is forced upon the false prophets of *Inf.* 20; likewise the proud Christians addressed by the poet in the apostrophe of *Purg.* 10 have faith in their “retrosi passi” (123). Like flight on the wings of desire, therefore, backward motion can be coded positively or negatively. This double coding is typical of *Purgatorio* (where the poet frequently assigns a positive valence to what had seemed like an exclusively negative code): in the verses cited above, for instance, the “perduta strada” is in fact positive, the road that the traveler has lost and hopes to find, and partakes only contrastively of the negative “perduto” of *Inf.* 26.84.

31. The similes of *Purg.* 26.67–69 and *Par.* 31.31–36 are based on the same contrast between “humble” countryside and “expert” *urbs*.

32. The pilgrim’s status as a legitimate non-Ulyssean *cosa nova* is underscored in the next canto by Guido del Duca, for whom the grace accorded to Dante is a “cosa che non fu più mai” (14.15).

33. Dante uses a periphrasis for the sun’s path to introduce Phaeton into the discourse, referring to “la strada / che mal non seppe carreggiar Fetòn” (*Purg.* 4.71–72).

34. The simoniac pope Nicholas III uses similar textual language when he expresses his wonder at the presumed early arrival of Boniface in hell: “Di parecchi anni mi menti lo scritto” (*Inf.* 19.54).

35. The entries “presumere,” “presuntuoso,” “presunzione” in the *ED* by Francesco Vagni speak, correctly, of “una temerarietà di ordine intellettuale” but fail to elaborate in terms of Dante’s longstanding concern with this problematic. In a *quaestio* entitled “De praesumptione,” *ST* 2a2ae.21 (Blackfriars 1966, ed. and trans. W. J. Hill), Aquinas comments that presumption “occurs by turning towards God in ways that are inordinate, much as despair takes place by turning away from God” (33:103), and that the sinner suffers from a lack of moderation, “hoping to obtain pardon without repentance or glory without merits” (105). Noting the fine line between genuine hope and presumption (“‘Presumption’ is sometimes used to describe what really is hope, because genuine hope in God when looked at from the vantage point of the human situation almost seems like presumption” [107–9]), Aquinas concludes by making the connection between presumption and pride: “presumption appears to spring directly from pride; implying, in effect, that one thinks so much of himself that he imagines God will not punish him nor exclude him from eternal life in spite of his continuing in sin” (113). Augustine offers a Ulyssean description of presumption in the *Confessions*, commenting on “the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal that they must reach, but cannot see the road by which they are to reach it, and those who see the road to that blessed country which is meant to be no mere vision but our home” (7.20).

36. In “Dante’s Biblical Linguistics,” *Lectura Dantis: A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation* 5 (1989): 105–43, Zygmunt G. Barański notes that Dante rewrites Genesis in proposing that Eve was the first to speak and suggests that “the reference

to Eve as the first speaker is a smokescreen . . . a pseudo-problem introduced to give a veneer of logical legitimation and the appearance of a valid philosophical *quaestio* to the ensuing discussion" (118). I would suggest, rather, that Eve is introduced as the epitome of *praesumptuositas*, Dante's overriding concern at this point in the treatise; indeed, for whom else could he so legitimately employ the redolent superlative, *presumptuosissima Eva*? I would add, moreover, that the issue of female speech is an obsessive one with Dante, who will end up reversing the silence of the lyric lady and the mis-speech of Eve with that most loquacious of literary ladies, the *Beatrice loquax* of *Paradiso*. Once more Dante's path is anomalous: the traditions he inherits boast female abstractions like Boethius's *Filosofia* who speak authoritatively, in a voice that is coded as non-gender-specific, i.e., masculine, and female nonabstractions who either do not speak or speak within the province of the gender-specific. In *Beatrice* Dante creates a historicized object of desire—not a personification—who yet speaks, indeed, in the *Paradiso*, speaks "like a man," unconstrained by the content or modality normatively assigned to female speech. In this ability to at least imaginatively reconcile the woman as a sexual and simultaneously intellectual presence, Dante was not followed by the humanists, who, in the accounts of recent feminist scholarship, were not particularly generous to their female counterparts, according them a voice only at the price of their sexuality.

37. The *De vulgari eloquentia* stresses Nimrod's failure to respect the mimetic hierarchy, whereby human "art" follows nature, which in turn follows God (*Inf.* 11.99–105). Rather than be content with the position of human art at the bottom of the hierarchy, Nimrod seeks to make it surpass not only nature, but also God, thus lifting it to the top of the ladder.

38. See chapter 3, note 13 for this grouping. Joan M. Ferrante, in "A Poetics of Chaos and Harmony," *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, points out that *arte* is the most used noun "core rhyme" in the *Commedia* (core rhymes are "rhyme groups in which one of the rhyme words is contained within the other two as if it were their core"); suggestively enough, the last appearance of *arte* in the poem shortly follows the last reference to Phaeton in *Par.* 31.125. Also suggestive, from the point of view of Dante's "Ulyssean" art, is the fact that, according to Ferrante's data, the second most present noun core rhyme word is *ali*.

39. The adjective appears once, with reference to Provenzan Salvani, who was "presuntüoso / a recar Siena tutta a le sue mani" (*Purg.* 11.122–23), in a context redolent of poetic pride.

40. With respect to the false prophets, and Dante's perception of the fundamental similarity between their calling and his own, leading to the defensiveness that therefore dictates his handling of them, see my "True and False See-ers in *Inferno* XX," *Lectura Dantis: A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation* 4 (1989): 42–54.

41. "Post hec veniamus ad Tuscus, qui propter amentiam suam infroniti titulum sibi vulgaris illustris arrogare videntur. Et in hoc non solum plebeia dementat intentio" (1.13.1).

42. Guittone d'Arezzo, because of the religious pretensions of his postconversion poetry became, for Dante, the example par excellence of the poet who goes beyond his limits, who "fishes for the truth and has not the art" (*Par.* 13.123); for Dante's views of Guittone, see *Dante's Poets*, 85–123.

43. "E oh stoltissime e vilissime bestiuole che a giusa d'uomo voi pascete, che presummete contra nostra fede parlare e volete sapere, filando e zappando, ciò che

Iddio, che tanta provedenza hae ordinata! Maladetti siate voi, e la vostra presunzione, e chi a voi crede!” (*Conv.* 4.5.9). In the *Questio de aqua et terra* as well, Dante writes that certain questions “proceed either from much foolishness or from much presumption, because they are above our intellect” (“vel a multa stultitia vel a multa presumptione procedunt, propterea quod sunt supra intellectum nostrum” [75]), and that we must desist from trying to understand the things that are above us, and search only as far as we are able: “Desinant ergo, desinant homines querere que supra eos sunt, et querant usque quo possunt” (77). Also in the *Questio* Dante defines the habitable earth as extending from Cadiz, on the western boundaries marked by Hercules, to the Ganges (“a Cadibus, que supra terminos occidentales ab Hercule positos ponitur, usque ad hostia fluminis Ganges” [54]), thus evoking Ulysses both through the Herculean interdict of *Inf.* 26 and the mad flight beyond Cadiz of *Par.* 27. In the *Epistole*, the Florentines are cast as mad and presumptuous transgressors (Dante uses the very word “transgredientes” for those “who transgress divine and human laws” [*Ep.* 6.5]), puffing themselves up in their arrogant rebellion (“presumendo tumescunt” [*Ep.* 6.4 and passim]); by contrast, the poet is endowed with a prophetic mind that does not err (“si presaga mens mea non fallitur” [*Ep.* 6.17]).

44. Other examples of this authorial concern are the passage in which Dante argues that it would be presumptuous to discuss (“presuntuoso sarebbe a ragionare”) the limit that God put on our imaginations (*Conv.* 3.4.10), as it is also presumptuous to attempt to speak of Cato (“O sacratissimo petto di Catone, chi presummerà di te parlare?” [*Conv.* 4.5.16]). On questions of authority in the *Convivio*, see Albert Russell Ascoli, “The Vowels of Authority (Dante’s *Convivio* IV.vi.3–4),” in *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 23–46.

45. Sapegno’s comment on “prescrisser” (“imposero un freno alla mia voglia di sapere”) clarifies the passage’s Ulyssean component, as does the consonance between “a tanto segno più mover li piedi” (*Par.* 21.99) and “il trapassar del segno.” Daniello’s gloss situates the *segno* toward which we are not to move within the context of the *trapassar del segno*: “Prescrivere propriamente significa assegnar termine ad alcuna cosa, il quale da essa non si possa trapassare” (quoted by Sapegno, *La Divina Commedia*, 3 vols. [Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968], 3:267).

46. Dante frequently registers a high level of defensive anxiety in the vicinity of his critiques of the Church. Thus, in the Epistle to the Italian cardinals we find him defending himself from the charge of being infected with the presumption of Uzzah (“Oze presumptio” [*Ep.* 11.12]). For further discussion of Uzzah, see chapter 6.

47. Giuseppe Mazzotta notes the importance of the digression, reading it however as an index not of transgression but of alienation, as a sign that “a rupture exists between history and the text” (*Dante, Poet of the Desert* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979], 136).

48. Mark Musa notes that “the interruption that is part of the narrative (when Sordello prevents Virgil from finishing his sentence) is followed by an interruption of the narrative itself” and that Dante “has interpolated between the first and second stages of Sordello’s embrace the longest auctorial intervention in the whole of the *Divine Comedy*, interrupting narrative time with auctorial time” (*Advent at the Gates: Dante’s “Comedy”* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974], 97–98).

49. Marie is warned lest she find herself, after her death, in a worse flock than the one to which her treachery consigned Pierre de la Brosse; the brief “digression” is

occasioned by the sight of Pierre among the group of souls who died violent deaths: "Pier da la Broccia dico; e qui proveggia, / mentr'è di qua, la donna di Brabante, / sì che però non sia di peggior greggia" (*Purg.* 6.22–24).

50. Both questions will be reprised in the heaven of justice, a heaven whose subtext is, to a great degree, the justice of Vergil's own damnation. See *Par.* 20.94–99, where the eagle will articulate the paradox of the dialectic between God's love and God's justice, already touched upon by Vergil in *Purg.* 6.

51. Sergio Corsi, "Per uno studio del 'modus digressivus,'" *Studi di italianistica: In onore di Giovanni Cecchetti*, ed. P. Cherchi and M. Picone (Ravenna: Longo, 1988), 75–89, argues that Dante conceived of the *modus digressivus* according to the wider canons of classical and medieval rhetoric (as encompassing formal shifts, like similes or descriptions of place and time), rather than in the more limited modern sense of major shifts in content. By contrast to the *Commedia*, the term *digressione* appears with some frequency in the *Convivio* (see the *ED* entry by Fernando Salzano). For Dante's self-conscious use of metaphors of departing and returning with respect to the voyage of discourse, see chapter 2, note 1.

52. The anaphoric "Vieni a veder" (in lines 106, 112, 115; repeated four times if we count "Vien, crudel, vieni, e vedi la pressura" in 109) derives from the Apocalypse, where it is also repeated four times: "Veni, et vide" is the command that each of the four beasts issues to St. John (Apoc. 6:1, 3, 5, 7). Dante's presentation of himself as a prophetic truth-teller thus gains from an implicit alignment of his text with the Book of Revelation; in fact, since Dante is the speaker, the analogy is between him and the four beasts on the one hand and between the negligent emperor and John as visionary witness on the other. More often, as we shall see in chapter 7, Dante is content to align himself with the author of the Apocalypse, whose four beasts figure prominently in the procession of the earthly paradise.

53. See Peter Armour, *The Door of Purgatory: A Study of Multiple Symbolism in Dante's "Purgatorio"* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), who points out that, because the episode of *Purg.* 9 "involves symbols and not personalities, [it] is one of the purest examples of polysemy in the *Comedy* and as such is one of the simplest episodes technically, if not conceptually" (144). One could propose an additional metapoetic polysemy with respect to the three steps leading up to purgatory's gate: each step could be taken to represent one of the *Commedia's* canticles, associating *Inferno* with the self-knowledge of the mirroring step, *Purgatorio* with the penitential suffering of the cracked and burned step, and *Paradiso* with Christ's redemptive blood and flaming passion as reflected in the third step. This reading, whereby the poet has inscribed a reference to his poem into the canto's figural symbolism, would further support Armour's case for the importance of this passage vis-à-vis the *Commedia* as a whole.

MARC COGAN

Part I: The Order of the Paradiso

Of the three *cantiche* of the *Commedia*, the *Paradiso* is the most fundamentally—one might say, organically—allegorical. It is the only *cantica* in which the use of the events of the literal narrative for figurative purposes is itself made an explicit part of that literal narrative. In the previous two *cantiche*, Dante *poeta* had, by gestures external to the action of the poem, called the reader's attention to the existence of allegorical meanings for the literal events Dante *personaggio* was experiencing.¹ But in the *Paradiso* the principle that literal appearances and events represent meanings existing at levels beyond the poem becomes itself a part of the experience of Dante *personaggio*. Allegory is no longer a matter of the poet's stepping out of the poem and self-consciously reminding us of the artifice of the poetry; rather, the characters of the poem themselves explicitly declare to Dante that what passes before his eyes as literal action is, in this realm, nothing less than divine artifice.

It is Beatrice who first and most authoritatively tells Dante that what he experiences at the literal level is not the truth of Paradise. What he sees is a poetic fiction. Its purpose, like the purpose of the *Commedia* itself in its allegorical significances, is to make manifest to Dante's limited human intelligence, by making manifest to his senses, meanings that actually exist on another, more abstract, plane. The blessed souls Dante meets in Heaven do not reside in the diverse spheres in which he encounters them. They reside

From *The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and Its Meaning*, pp. 149–75, 350–56. Copyright © 1999 by University of Notre Dame Press.

together in one single Heaven. Their appearance in the spheres is merely a corporeal sign, adapted to Dante's intellect, which, in its weakness, can function only by means of such signs.²

De' Serafin colui che più s'india,
 Moïse, Samuèl, e quel Giovanni
 che prender vuoli, io dico, non Maria,
 non hanno in altro cielo i loro scanni
 che questi spirti che mo t'appariro,

.....

ma tutti fanno bello il primo giro.

.....

Qui si mostraron, non perchè sortita
 sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno
 della celestïal c'ha men salita.

Così parlar conviensi al vostro ingegno,
 però che solo da sensato apprende
 ciò che fa poscia d'intelletto degno.

Per questo la Scrittura condescende
 a vostra facultate, e piedi e mano
 attribuisce a Dio, ed altro intende.

(*Par.* iv, 28–32, 34, 37–45)

Not only have the souls in Heaven arrayed themselves in fictive locations, their very appearance is itself illusory or enigmatic. Dante discovers, in speaking to Justinian in cantos v and vi, that even as Justinian becomes the more willing to answer Dante's questions, the happiness Justinian feels in this action renders the light in which he is enveloped more intense, and this paradoxically conceals him more completely from Dante.³

Sì come il sol che si cela elli stessi
 per troppa luce, come 'l caldo ha rose
 le temperanze di vapori spessi;
 per più letizia sì mi si nascose
 dentro al suo raggio la figura santa;
 e così chiusa chiusa mi rispose.

(*Par.* v, 133–38)

Nor is it only when Dante is still relatively inexperienced with Paradise, that is, in the early cantos of the *Paradiso*, that he is unable to see through to the truth of these figures. He experiences the same difficulty almost to the very

end of his journey. When, having already traveled through the greater part of Paradise, Dante specifically asks Saint Benedict to show him his face, rather than merely the flame that envelops him, Benedict refuses, cautioning Dante that such direct sight can only be accomplished in the last and highest location of Heaven, and reminding him, by implication, that until that time all the sights he sees remain only *imagini* “*coverte*.” Only in that sphere that is beyond place and time could Dante hope to see the truth.

“Però ti priego, e tu, padre, m’accerta
 s’io posso prender tanta grazia, ch’io
 ti veggia con imagine scoperta.”
 Ond’elli: “Frate, il tuo alto disio
 s’adempierà in su l’ultima spera,
 ove s’adempion tutti li altri e ’l mio.
 Ivi è perfetta, matura ed intera
 ciascuna disianza; in quella sola
 è ogni parte là ove sempr’era,
 perchè non è in loco, e non s’impola.”
 (*Par.* xxii, 58–67)

Until that moment, nothing that Dante sees is truly what it is. And yet, everything that Dante sees has significance. The fictions he perceives were prepared precisely because of their capacity to convey meaning to him. They are not mere fictions, Beatrice says, they are signs. If Dante does not, cannot, see the truth of Paradise directly, what he sees is at least a reflection of that truth. Indeed, reflection is one of the central themes of the *Paradiso*. Throughout this *cantica*, the words *figura* and *segno* and *specchio* recur, resonate, and become simultaneously problematic and heuristic. The very light that conceals the reality of the souls from Dante is in fact itself reflected light. Figures reflect truth, but truth embodied is also truth concealed, to a certain extent, as Beatrice, Justinian, and Benedict all remind us. We should note, and I believe are encouraged to note, that this same ambiguous quality is inherent also to poetry and allegory. The images of the souls Dante sees and the images of the poem which he presents to us share a common nature, and it is that nature that renders them at once revelatory and obscuring. They must be concrete so that he can perceive them, and to be concrete they must be manifested to him (and us) as particulars as if they were physical entities that existed in a discrete place at a determinate time. But the truth they aspire to convey is itself immaterial and eternal, universal and indivisible. In effect, the very process of allegory becomes an issue in the literal story of the third *cantica*,⁴ for the literal level of the *Paradiso* again and again draws attention to the need for, and the difficulty of, allegorical interpretation.

At the same time, however, interpretation of these images is rendered difficult for us because the figures we are given seem so much less suggestive than the figures Dante had provided in the first two *cantiche*. Insofar as images depend on concreteness and presence for conveying their truths, whether to Dante or to us, the images of the first two *cantiche* seem more successful and compelling to the extent that the punishments and corrections of Hell and Purgatory are richer in circumstantial detail. Each of those details is a resource and an occasion to the reader to interpret the underlying natures of the sins and virtues to which respective ordeals are related. But the Heaven of the *Paradiso* seems frustratingly devoid of such detail. One could argue that a picture of souls in Heaven ought to lack such concrete details since Heaven is beyond circumstance, but however theologically appropriate such an argument might be, it does not speak to the explicit poetic requirements of the *cantica*. Inasmuch as the souls have explicitly descended to merely fictive locations for Dante's and our edification, why must these fictions be such pallid fictions?

Yet, for all that the incidents of the *Paradiso* fall short of the vividness of the incidents of the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*, they nonetheless constitute figures clear enough in the aspects that matter for us to construct our interpretation of the *cantica*. The first and fundamental figure of the *Paradiso* is the structure of Heaven itself: the locations in which souls appear to Dante—those locations, coupled with the identities and characters of the individuals he meets in them. Compared with the events of the first two *cantiche*, this figure no doubt appears abstract, but we and Dante have been told by Beatrice that their appearance in those locations is Heaven's fiction created expressly for him. And as a figure it has been rather cannily adapted to an even more abstract truth it is intended to illuminate. There is a paradox in what Beatrice has told Dante: on the one hand, she seems to claim that blessedness is identical for all in Heaven; and yet the means by which Dante has Heaven explained to him, and the content of that explanation, assert and re-emphasize differences in the reasons for which people have been blessed and in the nature of their blessedness. The problematic truth of the *Paradiso* is a truth about ordering, and is reflected in a figure that first and foremost embodies order. In the four sections of this chapter we will consider the character of the order of Heaven, the source of that order, and its significance.

Part I

The Order of the *Paradiso*

The Order of Blessedness

There is, after all, an order to Heaven just as there had been to Hell and Purgatory, and while Beatrice does not give Dante an explicit explanation of

the principle that articulates that order (as Virgil had of Hell and Purgatory), her statement that the souls have dispersed themselves to the locations that compose this order for didactic purposes—to render comprehensible by his limited human intellect some truth regarding Heaven—provides a guarantee that this order is in itself significant, and that it exists to be interpreted so that its significance be understood. The structure of Paradise, the number and order of the celestial spheres through which Beatrice and Dante travel, thus plays the identical functional role as had the circles of Hell and the *gironi* of Purgatory. Discovering the principle that underlies its order, and discovering the principle by which souls are assigned to one or another sphere becomes the means of determining both the common nature and also the individual specification of blessedness, in the same way that discovering the principle that directed the orders of Hell and Purgatory revealed to us the general nature and specific qualities of sin and redemption.

As an allegorical image, the order of the celestial spheres also explicitly shares the primary and fundamental figurative strategy that is embodied in the orders of the two other realms. As descent in Hell reflected the increasing seriousness of the sins there punished; as ascent in Purgatory reflected the diminishing seriousness of the vices to be purged; so ascent through the spheres of Paradise reflects an increasing blessedness of the souls Dante encounters and the activities they represent. But even to make so intuitive an assertion confronts us with a paradox. The passage we have already cited from Beatrice implies that there is no difference in the blessedness of souls and angels in Heaven, and yet the existence of difference is unequivocally supported not only by the order of the spheres, but also by the statements of the souls with whom Dante converses. Insofar as all souls, whatever their natures and characters, inhabit the same Heaven, as Beatrice declares (*Par.* iv, 28–33; and, indeed, she does not restrict this statement only to human souls: the highest order of angels shares this habitation with all human souls), all are equally blessed. And yet the comments of souls he questions frequently distinguish souls from each other in terms of their blessedness.⁵

Piccarda Donati, in the first sphere, is sensitive to the fact that her location appears lowly to Dante (it is she who so characterizes it), and admits that its lowliness is a result of her own failings:

E questa sorte che par giù cotanto,
però nè data, perchè fuor negletti
li nostri voti, e voti in alcun canto.
(*Par.* iii, 55–57)

When Dante asks her whether she would not prefer to be closer so that she might see God better, he, on his side, makes a natural assumption that

distance from God must diminish, or at least set a limit to, the joy she can experience in Heaven.

Ma dimmi: voi che siete qui felici,
disiderate voi più alto loco
per più vedere e per più farvi amici?
(*Par.* iii, 64–66)

Piccarda does not deny that this is so. Her charity, and the pleasure she takes in conforming to God's will, which has assigned this location to her, restrains her desire (*Par.* iii, 70–75). But in the very act of condemning any desire to be higher in Heaven as discordant to God's will, she perforce recognizes that a "higher" does exist in Heaven, to which other souls, if not she, might appropriately aspire. And when she says that charity makes her wish only for what she has ("che fa volerne / sol quel ch'avemo, e d'altro non ci asseta" [*Par.* iii, 71–72]), she implies that other souls do indeed have more of blessedness than she. Justinian, in the next sphere, understands that his appearance in a relatively lowly sphere mirrors his merit, and his human shortcomings, and that this location provides a figure of the measure of reward he has earned. At the same time, of course, the location also implies other higher rewards he has not merited or received. Since divine justice would inevitably match reward to merit, and since recognizing the operation of divine justice would give a blessed soul pleasure, that recognition makes even the awareness of possessing a lesser reward sweet.

Questa picciola stella si correda
di buoni spirti che son stati attivi
perchè onore e fama li succeda:
e quando li disiri poggian quivi,
sì disviando, pur convien che i raggi
del vero amore in su poggin men vivi.
Ma nel commensurar di nostri gaggi
col merto è parte di nostra letizia,
perchè non li vedem minor nè maggi.
Quindi addolcisce la viva giustizia
in noi l'affetto sì, che non si puote
torcer già mai ad alcuna nequizia.
(*Par.* vi, 112–23)

But that in his case, as in Piccarda's, it is justice that restrains desire, and tempers it so that it does not turn to envy, demonstrates Justinian's awareness

too that there are in fact greater rewards than those he has received, reserved for others of greater merit or grace who, we recognize as we read this passage, will manifest themselves to Dante in higher spheres. Indeed, at the same moment that Beatrice informs Dante that all souls, whatever their grandeur or modesty, live in the one empyrean sphere, she does also admit that souls experience joy diversely, and that their appearance in the various celestial spheres provides a sign of their achievement in what she calls “rising” among the heavenly ranks:

Ma tutti fanno bello il primo giro,
 e differentemente han dolce vita
 per sentir più e men l'eterno spiro.
 Qui si mostraron, non perchè sortita
 sia questa spera lor, ma per far segno
 della celestïal c'ha men salita.
 (*Par.* iv, 34–39)

Even in the *candida rosa*, that one true habitation of all blessed souls, location reflects merit. Bernard of Clairvaux points Beatrice out to Dante “nel trono che suoi meriti le sortiro” (*Par.* xxxi, 68–69); Adam and Peter sit closest to Mary, highest up on the rose, while other souls are arranged downward from them (*Par.* xxxii, 115–26); and those souls who are in Heaven for merits not their own (infants and children) sit below those who are there in reward of their own actions (*Par.* xxxii, 40–45).⁶ Even among the angels, as Beatrice explains, greater closeness to God brings increased delight, and this greater reward reflects merit, or it might be more proper to say vision, which in their case is the same.

E dei saper che tutti hanno diletto
 quanto la sua veduta si profonda
 nel vero in che si queta ogni intelletto.
 Quinci si può veder come si fonda
 l'esser beato nell'atto che vede,
 non in quel ch'ama, che poscia seconda;
 e del vedere è misura mercede,
 che grazia partorisce e buona voglia:
 così di grado in grado si procede.
 (*Par.* xxviii, 106–14)

But if we admit that there exist grades of blessedness among the souls and angels in Heaven, in what sense or senses can it be appropriate to say

that souls are more or less blessed? The outline of an answer to this question had been given through the figure of Solomon in the fourteenth canto, and it is in the context of his earlier statement that we can understand the full significance of Beatrice's application of his principle to angels. Solomon, indeed, had already provided the principle that explains the assertion that Beatrice makes regarding the diverse blessedness of angels, and the principle he had enunciated makes her assertion effectively true of blessed human souls as well: that is, joy and delight are proportional to the vision the souls have of God.

Solomon had called attention to what is probably the most frequently repeated poetic figure of the *Paradiso*: that in looking at God souls become filled by, and in turn reflect, the light of God; and that, within the spatial metaphor of the spheres, as the spheres that souls occupy are closer to God, the brightness of the souls increases. Dante had already noticed this, and will continue to throughout the *Paradiso*, both in the souls he encounters and in the increasing brightness of Beatrice's eyes, as they approach God during the journey. According to Solomon, the diverse brilliance with which souls manifest themselves to Dante depends on the ardor of their love; that, in turn, depends on the acuity of their vision; and that acuity on the measure of grace each soul has received.

... Quanto fia lunga la festa
di paradiso, tanto il nostro amore
si raggerà dintorno cotal vesta.
La sua chiarezza seguita l'ardore;
l'ardor la visione, e quella è tanta,
quant'ha di grazia sovra suo valore.
(*Par.* xiv, 37–42)

Solomon takes the dependence of acuity of vision on grace in a most concrete sense: in his explanation, the grace bestowed on the souls is divine light itself, light that serves as a necessary condition to sight, presumably, as in most discussions of the process of seeing, as the medium of vision.⁷

... ciò che ne dona
di gratuito lume il sommo bene,
lume ch'a lui veder ne condiziona.
(*Par.* xiv, 46–48)

This explanation of the principle of the souls' brilliance in turn explains and fills out an observation that Dante *personaggio* had made earlier in the

Paradiso, in his first address to Justinian. There, he had noticed that the light within which Justinian was concealed seemed to have its source in Justinian's eyes:

Io veggio ben sì come tu t'annidi
 nel proprio lume, e che delli occhi il traggi,
 perch'è' corusca sì come tu ridi.
 (*Par.* v, 124–26)

But Dante's original conclusion, we now see, was incomplete. While the souls' eyes do indeed provide the light that clothes them, they are not the source of that light. They diffuse light only because they reflect light they themselves have first received from God. Souls appear brighter or dimmer to Dante to the extent that they have received more or less of this light, and in the spatial metaphor of the *Paradiso*, they do so as they are closer to God or farther away. In the context of Solomon's explanation, however, we come to realize that what Dante initially experienced as a merely phenomenal change in the appearance of the souls embodies, and is a figure for, a far more significant spiritual difference. Inasmuch as the same light that alters the appearance of the souls is also the necessary condition of their vision, those souls that appear brighter to Dante because they have received more light are also more capable of apprehending God by means of that light.

Beatrice has told Dante that what he sees is only a corporeal representation, adapted to his intellect, of the truth of Heaven, and in the explanation of these phenomena we see two interlocking figures. Location and brilliance become two metaphors of the same quality. "Closeness," in the sense of occupying a sphere closer to God, is merely the physical or spatial manifestation of "having received greater grace." Greater brightness in the appearance of the souls signifies the same thing. Since we know, in the physical world, that brightness is proportionate to the distance from the source of light, the two images of brilliance and location mutually confirm each other. But the physical properties of distance and illumination also embody an even more important doctrine.

According to Solomon, in seeing God more clearly the souls experience more love. But more important still is the consequence drawn by Beatrice in a passage we have already cited. Since delight is proportionate to apprehension—"tutti hanno diletto / quanto la sua veduta sì profonda / nel vero" (*Par.* xxviii, 106–8)—a soul's greater ability to see God will also bring it more joy. It is in this specific respect that it turns out to be possible to distinguish degrees of blessedness among the souls in Heaven.⁸ The amount of delight, or blessedness, a soul experiences depends on the soul's capacity for the activity in

which delight resides. Some souls, being more capable, will inevitably experience more delight. It is that difference in capacity that is given its figurative expression in the respective locations of the souls in Heaven as Dante encounters them.

The principle not only provides a concrete basis for recognizing differences in the blessedness of souls, it also explains why souls feel no envy in regard of these differences. For if the greater or lesser degrees of blessedness are the consequence of greater or lesser capacities for apprehension, and only of that, then it can be said of every soul that the blessedness it receives is not only as much as it is entitled to, but as much as it is capable of. It is not, therefore, only out of a sense of duty and obedience that souls do not envy those who experience more blessedness than they. Souls recognize that they experience all the blessedness that they can. It is not possible for them to experience more joy than they do (they do not have the acuity to do so), and so, they have no reason to feel deprived or envious.

That this is so also provides a solution to the paradox with which we began this consideration. Why are we shown souls in discrete spheres if all inhabit the same Heaven? Or, perhaps at this stage the question is more pressing looked at from the other perspective: If souls are distinguishable by the amounts of grace they have received, how is it proper to say they all inhabit the same Heaven? Both aspects are now reconcilable. All souls inhabit the same Heaven insofar as all souls are completely blessed. (In an Aristotelian sense we might even say, more properly, that they are perfectly blessed.) As some souls have greater capacities for blessedness, however, their complete blessedness could be said, in a relative sense only, to be greater than that of others. But no soul is, or feels that it is, in any way deficient in its blessedness. The perfection of all souls' blessedness is expressed in their true location in a single Heaven. Their differing capacities for blessed activity are expressed in the discrete spheres in which Dante encounters them.

We should note, finally, that the principle of rewarding pious souls with all the joy they are capable of experiencing is effectively identical to the principle of punishing the damned by making them pursue eternally the same delights that condemned them to Hell. It is not proper, one supposes, to speak of a "*contrapasso*" in Heaven, but the principle of punishing and rewarding souls with what delighted them (and to the extent it delighted them) runs uniformly from Heaven to Hell, and testifies to the simplicity, in a theological sense, of divine justice.⁹

Merit and Character

But if the explanations given by Beatrice and Solomon show us how it is possible that souls experience different degrees of blessedness, they do not

yet explain why different souls would have these different capacities. For in the process as Solomon describes it, the differing capacities of souls to apprehend God and experience blessedness is attributed to their greater or lesser possession of the gratuitous light that provides a medium for vision. What is missing, to this point, is an explanation as to why the individual souls (and presumably, the more general human activities and qualities they represent) should receive the differing amounts of grace that they do, and which then condition their degree of blessedness. Solomon states that the grace souls receive is beyond their merits (*sovra suo valore*), but that declaration does not imply that the amount they receive is arbitrary.¹⁰ Even the minimum of grace, after all, could be said to be beyond human merit. For Dante, no human being could merit salvation by his or her own actions alone. The magnitude of the debt incurred by original sin, and human incapacity to repay it, is the fundamental human condition that demands the incarnation of Christ for its solution. This theological common place is given explicit statement by Beatrice at *Paradiso* vii, 19–51, and vii, 85–120.¹¹ But knowing that all grace is beyond human power will still not explain why some souls receive more grace than others.

As souls do manifest themselves to Dante, they do so as if the principle that allotted them different amounts of grace and indicated where they should locate themselves to make this manifest did somehow operate as if in reward of their lives and according to the actions that characterized their lives. Dante does not meet random individual souls in his journey; he meets souls gathered in groups who all pursued common ends, sometimes, we might even say, common professions. All the souls of the fourth sphere were philosophers or theologians; all of the sixth, rulers. The souls of each of the first three spheres exhibit distinguishing defects in their lives. Insofar as groups of souls are presented to Dante in a hierarchical order in his upward journey through the spheres, we as readers are presented with an exposition that seems inescapably to declare that the measures of grace allotted these souls were based on the nature of the actions that characterized their lives. Human action may not be sufficient to merit the grace that makes possible the vision of God, yet the character of that action seems to bear a direct relation to the measure of grace and blessedness any soul does receive.

If I keep using circumlocutions regarding what receives a given measure of grace, such as “the character of the actions to which certain souls were most akin,” or “the actions that characterized an individual’s life,” rather than simply saying “the deeds they did” or “the actions they undertook,” it is because I believe that one of Dante’s motives in speaking about the allotting of grace as being “beyond merit” was to bypass any merely conventional estimation of merit as the basis of the order we discover in Heaven. For if we consider the

souls we encounter, and the places in which we encounter them, it becomes clear that, while souls are arranged in Heaven according to some common active characteristics, we cannot say in any simple way that souls find themselves placed in Heaven according to the actions they took while alive.

It is only as we read the *Paradiso* that we see how critical it is to understand the principle of order and reward in Heaven, though we could have come to grips with this problem at any moment in the *Purgatorio*, had we stopped to ask the question, Where will any of these many souls whom we are watching suffer for their vices be located in Heaven once they have completed their corrections in Purgatory? Where, for example, will someone like Buonconte da Montefeltro, a sinner to the last instant of his life, be placed? This is not a question with which Dante deals in the *Purgatorio*, nor, for that matter, in the *Paradiso*, except implicitly by his placement of souls in Heaven, about certain of whom we know just enough to see how problematic any answer to the question must be. For from the very first cantos of the *Paradiso* we encounter souls who make the simplest answer to the question untenable.

Our initial impulse would be to assume that justice demands that a person such as Buonconte, and any other whose life had been predominantly sinful, must find his ultimate place in the lowest spheres of Heaven. We would be assuming a material connection between the piety of one's earthly life and the measure of one's reward. The more pious the life, the higher one's place in Heaven; the more sinful, the lower. Yet several of the blessed souls we encounter in the lowest spheres show that Dante's understanding of the allocation of heavenly rewards does not follow any such material conception of justice. In the *Purgatorio*, we have been given a simple test for measuring the relative piety or sinfulness of someone's life. The amount of time spent in Purgatory, we are told, corresponds to the number and recalcitrance of the vices possessed by a sinner. Since the recalcitrance of vice depends directly on the degree to which the bad habit that is the vice has been practiced, the number of years spent in Purgatory provides a rough but fair measure of the ingrained sinfulness of a person's soul, irrespective of his or her ultimate salvation. Those who spend the least time in Purgatory, then, do so because their lives were freest of vice and sin. The simplest and most conventional sense of justice would expect that such souls should wind up placed highest in Heaven; those who have spent longer in Purgatory should be lower. But virtually from the start of the *Paradiso* we find Dante contradicting such a conclusion.

Charles Martel, for example, had been dead only five years when Dante encounters him in Heaven. Even if he is only just arrived in Heaven (which he neither says nor implies) and therefore had spent five years in Purgatory, if we compare that with Statius' twelve hundred years of purgation, we would have to conclude that his sins were insignificant. We would have to reach

a similar conclusion concerning Piccarda Donati. Although the date of her death is not known precisely, given her brother Forese's recent death (such that hers would probably not have preceded it much in time), she too must have arrived in Heaven with no, or scarcely any, stop in Purgatory. Indeed, Piccarda's life was exemplary in its holy beauty to her family and friends, and Forese was convinced that her prompt entry into Heaven was just recompense for that:

La mia sorella, che tra bella e bona
non so qual fosse più, triunfa lieta
nell'alto Olimpo già di sua corona.
(*Purg.* xxiv, 13–15)

But Dante *poeta* places her in the lowest sphere of Heaven, and Piccarda herself, as was cited above, calls attention to the lowliness of her station, and its justice. Charles Martel manifests himself to Dante only in the third sphere. In both cases, we find figures treated in a way that minimizes their blessedness and holiness despite their having led lives so pure as to require almost no purgation of vice. Yet if souls with so little sin in them are assigned so small a measure of grace, where is there room for justice in the handling of souls whose sins were far greater? Buonconte da Montefeltro, we have been told, had already spent eleven years in the antepurgatory before Dante met him there, and was to spend many more in that spot (a period at least equal to the length of his life) before he could even begin the process of purgation. But despite his sinful life, Buonconte will inevitably be rewarded at least as generously as Piccarda, for there is in fact no way to allot him less grace than she: there is no sphere lower than hers with which he could be associated. Were Dante to imagine him associated with any other sphere, his reward would in fact be beyond hers. Since we are sure that the order of Heaven must embody a principle of just reward, it cannot be the simple piety or sinfulness of these individuals' lives that is being rewarded.

The question is not merely hypothetical, since it seems clear that Dante could indeed imagine a person like Buonconte rewarded more generously than Piccarda, to judge from his placement of certain highly equivocal figures, if not outright sinners, in far more elevated positions than those occupied by the relatively pure Piccarda and Charles. Siger de Brabant and Joachim da Fiore, both condemned by their contemporaries for heretical writings, appear in the *Commedia* among the theologians.¹² Even more perplexing, when we consider their lives overall, are some of the kings to whom Dante calls special attention in the sixth sphere by placing them so as to form the eye of the eagle, which is the central poetic image of their sphere:

Perchè de' fuochi ond'io figura fommi,
 quelli onde l'occhio in testa mi scintilla,
 e' di tutti lor gradi son li sommi.
 (*Par.* xx, 34-36)

But though all kings are given grace far greater than Piccarda's or Charles's (they are rewarded in the sixth sphere), and though those who form the eye are singled out even among kings, it cannot be for the sinlessness or general holiness of their lives. These specially distinguished kings are led by David, an adulterer and murderer, followed by two kings, Constantine and Hezekiah, whose actions led ultimately to disaster, though they are exonerated because of the rectitude of their intentions.¹³ These three are then followed by two pagans, Trajan and Ripheus,¹⁴ and finally William the Good of Sicily, about whom all that the commentators declare is that he was generous and more just than his predecessor or his successors.¹⁵ What leads to their appearance in this sixth sphere cannot be the conventional moral quality of their earthly lives. That, apparently, must be seen as no more than secondary; possibly it is even irrelevant.¹⁶ And that Dante takes such a casual attitude toward the actual events of the lives of the souls he meets when it comes to determining their placement in Heaven is what has led me to be so periphrastic in describing what it is about their actions or lives that actually does determine their location.

Yet if the actual earthly piety or sinfulness does not play a determining role in the grace awarded souls, as revealed in the order in which they manifest themselves to Dante, their distribution among the spheres is nonetheless meant to reveal significant distinctions in the origin (as well as measure) of the blessedness of these souls and others like them. But, then, what principles are being used? If we look at the question of finding a principle to determine the order from Dante's standpoint as he composed the poem, we can recognize that the very question of how to distinguish souls presents both poetic and theological problems. Certain criteria, it turns out, cannot be used. The current state of the souls, for example, cannot be used to make the distinction. Upon emerging from Purgatory, all souls should, in a sense, have become equally pure, and therefore their current (now eternal) purity is something they have in common and will not distinguish them from one another. We might look to the pasts of these souls for *differentiae*, but, as we have already noticed, we cannot use the degree of purity of those pasts as the criterion and yet place them in the order of Heaven that we find in the *Paradiso*.

Indeed, as we consider the nature of the poetic problem, it becomes clear that any criterion to be used for distinguishing the source of the blessedness of the souls must meet some difficult and demanding conditions. On the one

hand, even if we reject the purity of the souls' pasts as the standard against which to judge their rewards, the criteria we choose should still reflect some quality or qualities of the souls' earthly lives. This is so for a double reason: First, because justice, in a sense, demands it. We need to see that reward follows human action in some sense at least. Second, the criteria must reflect earthly lives because it is in fact only in their earthly lives that we see distinctions (rather than commonalities) between these souls. But if the needs of human understanding require that the criteria reflect something of earthly action, other—we may say, eternal—needs place further demands on the poet in making his distinctions. For at the same time that the criteria must reflect this world, they must also reflect qualities that are not of this world, and this demand too is for a double reason. First, it would seem that criteria for distinguishing souls in Heaven should reflect qualities that endure in some fashion into their immortal lives, and hence that could serve as eternal and unchanging grounds for the souls' distinction. Second, if the order of Heaven that we are to be presented is to reflect earthly estimations of the value of human activities as little as it does, the standards by which the estimations of the *Paradiso* are made must have their origin elsewhere than in human judgment.

The fourth canto of the *Paradiso* begins with Dante *personaggio* torn between two different questions: how to estimate Piccarda's "merit," and how to account for her location in a particular celestial sphere (*Par.* iv, 19–24). The way in which Beatrice addresses the problem points us toward those qualities that Dante believed provided the basis according to which grace is allotted to individual souls. Beatrice takes and restates Dante's question as to why souls appear in a given sphere as if he were wondering whether Plato was correct in believing souls originated each in its own planet, to which it returned at its death. She then answers his question by first rejecting the Platonic notion that individual souls return to the different stars by which they were created (*Par.* iv, 49–54).

Quel che Timeo dell'anime argomenta
 non è simile a ciò che qui si vede,
 però che, come dice, par che senta.
 Dice che l'alma alla sua stella riede,
 credendo quella quindi esser decisa
 quando natura per forma la diede.
 (*Par.* iv, 49–54)

Her rejection is for two reasons. On the one hand, she explains, the souls Dante encounters do not actually reside in the spheres in which he sees them. They merely manifest themselves to him there. (We have already cited this

passage above.) Thus, properly speaking, no souls return to any planet. On the other hand, though, Beatrice also condemns any belief that human souls were created by the lesser intelligences who move the planets and stars. The consensus among commentators is that she does so on the grounds that such belief is inconsistent with the freedom of the will.¹⁷ It is equally likely, and for the argument of the passage more appropriate, that she condemns it because, as Statius had previously stated (*Purg.* xxv, 70–72) and as Charles Martel repeats (*Par.* vii, 142–43), the creation of each human soul is an individual creative act of God, not of any lesser minister. But, at the same time that she rejects the doctrine that souls return to these stars that move in the spheres as if to their homes, Beatrice does state explicitly that the souls manifest themselves to Dante in these spheres to indicate the stars to which the praise and blame for their actions—though not the origin of their existence—must be attributed.

S'elli [Timæus] intende tornare a queste ruote
l'onor della influenza e 'l biasmo, forse
in alcun vero suo arco percuote.
(*Par.* iv, 58–60)

Thus, while Beatrice says it is wrong to believe that the stars create souls, she agrees that it is correct to assign to their influence over human action the formative power to which praise or blame is due. Asking, Why praise *and* blame? convinces us that it is influence over character of which we are speaking, rather than over individual actions. It is not that some stars produce wholly praiseworthy results and others wholly blameworthy. Certainly, the meaning intended is that the stars give their shape to the character of a person born under their influence.¹⁸ Whether persons use that character for good or ill is a matter of their free choice. But good *or* ill, their actions will reflect the influence of that star, with its characteristic and characterizing qualities.

That the stars were responsible for personal character was an ancient and medieval commonplace, and Dante gives ample evidence of his agreement in it.¹⁹ The extent of the stars' influence, and the manner of exerting that influence was, however, open to considerable and significant dispute. Aquinas, for example, repeatedly and consistently argued that the stars could influence human character only through their influence over the human body, and over character, therefore, only indirectly, through the body's influence over those parts of the soul (for example, the sensitive appetites) with unbreakable connections to the body.²⁰

Dante, for his part, does not restrict the stars' influence only to transient (or even enduring but merely mortal) inclinations based on the operation of bodily passions. According to Beatrice, praise and blame can be attributed to the stars, even when we consider praise and blame in the context of eternal reward. Thus, in the *Paradiso*, the stars seem to have influence even over the immortal and immaterial aspects of human character. Already in the *Purgatorio*, Marco Lombardo's discussion of free will (*Purg.* xvi, 65–93), while assigning final responsibility for good or evil actions to free choice, admitted that the roots of human action were to be found in the spheres (“Lo cielo i vostri movimenti inizia”; *Purg.* xvi, 73). Charles Martel's lengthy explanation of how it is that worse children may be born to better fathers not only testifies to Dante's belief in the principle of the stars' influencing human character, but articulates the specific role played by the stars in doing so.²¹

Charles calls attention, first of all, to how significantly different the characters are between individuals. They are different enough to make civil government the greatest terrestrial good. Were characters not so different, that would not be true. When Charles makes this argument, Dante *personaggio* agrees completely (*Par.* viii, 115–20). Such different effects, Charles argues (*Par.* viii, 122–25), must have their own diverse causes, but the corporeal nature of humans will not account for these differences. Matter in itself is unchanging, and so cannot account for the differences in character. By inheritance, were that the only cause, people would never differ. They differ by what informs that matter: the spheres, which imprint their formative influence on the soul, as agents of divine providence.

La circular natura, ch'è suggello
 alla cera mortal, fa ben sua arte,
 ma non distingue l'un dall'altro ostello.
 Quinci addivien ch'Esau si diparte
 per seme da Iacòb; e vien Quirino
 da sì vil padre, che si rende a Marte.
 Natura generata il suo cammino
 simil farebbe sempre a' generanti,
 se non vincesses il proveder divino.
 (*Par.* viii, 127–35)²²

And so powerful is this formative influence on the characters of individuals, so innately ingrained, that is to say, are the characters of individual humans, that to try to train someone to a life contrary to this character is both futile and counterproductive.

Sempre natura, se fortuna trova
 discorde a sè, com'ogni altra semente
 fuor di sua regïon, fa mala prova.
 E se 'l mondo là giù ponesse mente
 al fondamento che natura pone,
 seguendo lui, avria buona la gente.
 Ma voi torcete alla religïone
 tal che fia nato a cignersi la spada,
 e fate re di tal ch'è da sermone:
 onde la traccia vostra è fuor di strada.
 (*Par.* viii, 139–48)

As Statius had before him, Charles argues for the uniqueness of the creation of the human soul. One cannot say that the human soul “grows,” like the souls of animals or plants. Plant and animal souls do grow from the material of the parents, whose formative power is itself material (*Purg.* xxv, 37–60). But the human soul is divine in its origin, both directly and indirectly. It has its existence directly from God (“ma vostra vita sanza mezzo spira / la somma beninanza”; *Par.* vii, 142–43; cf. *Purg.* xxv, 70–75); it receives its character indirectly from the spheres, which carry out the will of God.

Lo ben che tutto il regno che tu scandi
 volge e contenta, fa esser virtùte
 sua provedenza in questi corpi grandi.
 E non pur le nature provedute
 sono in la mente ch'è da sì perfetta,
 ma esse insieme con la lor salute:
 per che quantunque quest'arco saetta
 disposto cade a proveduto fine,
 sì come cosa in suo segno diretta.
 (*Par.* viii, 97–105)²³

With its character determined from the beginning of its life as a human, a human soul can be said to grow only in the sense that actualizing the potential given it by its creator and its creator's instruments is also a sort of coming into being. The soul does not grow by adding new properties or capacities. It has been given its own. It does, however, progressively actualize the capacities it was given, and in that sense grows into the character that at first was only potential. How the imprint of the planets is actualized in the concrete actions of an individual—both in terms of which particular actions actualize that potency and in terms of whether they are good or evil actions—is the result

of that person's free will. In this network of causes, no conflict exists between the operations of predestination and free will. God and his agents predetermine the general character of the actions an individual will undertake; the individual undertakes the particular actions by free choice.²⁴

When souls manifest themselves to Dante in the spheres, they do so in order to exhibit to him to which stars' influence their actions (with resulting praise and blame), and their degree of blessedness, should be attributed. Souls appear in the poem in those spheres whose influence informed the characters that they spent their lives actualizing, whether the actions of their lives were good or evil.²⁵ That is the poetic principle affirmed in declarations by Cunizza and Folquet of Marseilles, speaking in the sphere of Venus:

Cunizza fui chiamata, e qui refulgo
 perchè mi vinse il lume d'esta stella;

 ... e questo cielo
 di me [Folquet] s'imprenta, com'io fe' di lui.
 (*Par.* ix, 32–33, 95–96)

Cunizza confirms that souls are distributed among spheres in Heaven according to the celestial influences that defined the character of their souls and impressed this character on their actions.²⁶ But pointedly she does not say that souls are distributed in Heaven according to the good or bad results of their actions, and in that omission expresses a principle of merit and grace very different from the conventional. The principle does respect the different characters of an individual's life on earth, which we said our sense of justice and poetry demanded. Giving a specific definition to a human character, after all, would surely find its reflections in the signal actions persons perform while alive (albeit, in some cases, obscurely), insofar as a character shaped in a certain way would regularly produce actions that were, as we would say, characteristic. Thus, the placement of souls in Heaven, insofar as it corresponds to the definition of their characters, reflects their individuality. Moreover, the definition given a soul's character is precisely a property that would endure in the soul even after its separation from the body, and thus this principle furnishes a standard for the eternal distinction of the souls in Heaven.²⁷

But, at the same time, the shaping or defining influence of the stars would be reflected in all of a person's actions, irrespective of whether those actions were good or ill. Even sinners, then, can be used to embody and call attention to these defining influences, since their bad actions will share a recognizably characteristic shape with the good actions of those virtuous souls

who were moved by the same celestial influence. Here, the principle departs from our conventional assessments of merit, though in a way that is also poetically liberating to Dante. Forgiven sinners will be rewarded in the same way as saints, if both have been defined by the influence of the same star. Perhaps this is even appropriate, since, as we have already considered, all souls in Heaven ultimately are equally sinless, either because of the original purity of their lives, or through the purgation of their vices. In any case, in determining the location in Heaven of the souls he encounters, Dante needed no longer to worry about assessing the moral value of their human actions. Rather, he could order the souls by reflection on the underlying nature or character of their actions and their capacities for action.

This, presumably, is what would explain the appearance in relatively exalted spheres of souls whose human life exhibited vice as well as virtue; it would also direct our forecasts as to the ultimate location of souls we have encountered in Purgatory. Once sinfulness/sinlessness is removed as the primary criterion for the location of souls, a soul such as Buonconte da Montefeltro's would most naturally manifest itself in that sphere whose power informed his capacities, even though those capacities found expression in his life most frequently in sinful actions. In many cases, this will result in placing notable sinners above the souls of individuals whose lives were much purer. But we have already been told that grace is awarded *sovra valore*, and the location of the souls exhibits to Dante a hierarchy not of good works but of capacity. The blessed souls, clearly, see no injustice in this allocation: they recognize that some souls, in their formation, were graced with a greater *capacity* for apprehending God. Some people with such souls may not have used this capacity well while alive, but the capacity must be as enduring as the soul itself that was shaped to that capacity; that is to say, immortal. And so, having overcome the evil actions and habits of their lives through forgiveness and purgation, these souls in Heaven necessarily acquire greater blessedness, since they will now exercise their capacity in its perfected state.²⁸ We have here the perfect inversion of the punishments of Hell. As the damned are condemned to practice eternally a clarified version of their defining sinful acts, the blessed are rewarded by the opportunity to practice eternally a clarified version of their defining spiritual qualities. There is only one justice, and since it is one that gives to our natures what is most natural, and therefore most desirable, to them, nothing could be more just.

The Quality, Not Quantity, of Holiness

But which capacities? And why are they in this order? For to conclude that souls are rewarded according to their capacities for action rather than their actual living actions provides only a riddling explanation of their location in

Heaven if it cannot answer these two fundamental questions. That the souls' distance from God indicates different degrees of their blessedness—this we understand instinctively. That the souls Dante encounters in different spheres are grouped together because they share common qualities or capacities—this we also accept as poetically straightforward. The order of the celestial spheres in which the groups of souls are found therefore also embodies a hierarchy among these specific diverse capacities. We could expect to conclude, further, that the structure of this order establishes the primary distinctions and outline of the allegorical meaning of this *cantica* by articulating in the groups manifesting themselves in each sphere an enumeration of those human capacities of eternal theological significance. But we will not know the content of that allegory until we can identify which capacities the spheres articulate, and until we can account for the order in which we find them. Now, we can find our evidence for the identification of the capacities themselves in what we know of the individuals whom Dante encounters, and, to a lesser extent, in what we may know was believed in conventional astrology of the planets and stars as agents and influences over human life. The principle of their order, as we shall see, resides in a special Dantean interpretation of the nature of the spheres.

I believe that we recognize intuitively that the capacities by which Dante distinguishes the grace allotted souls are qualitatively different from one another.²⁹ The different degrees of blessedness are not to be accounted for simply by the possession of greater or lesser quantities of one single quality of holiness. Our sense of the qualitative differences between spheres is grounded, on the one hand, in declarations by individuals with whom Dante speaks of common traits among all who manifest themselves in a given sphere and, on the other, in the significant differences between the characters of the lives of those who appear in one sphere or another. Some of the spheres are locations for different professions that call for and exhibit different skills or capacities: emperors, theologians, warriors. In other spheres the community is based on a more general common pattern of action or way of life: Justinian says that all who appear to Dante in the sphere of Mercury led active lives for the sake of honor and fame (*Par.* vi, 112–14); Charles Martel and Cunizza explain that in the sphere of Venus appear those who were vanquished by human love (*Par.* viii, 34–39, ix, 32–33).

The homogeneity of souls in each sphere (and their distinction from the souls of other spheres) is of fundamental importance, for in the structure of the *Paradiso* Dante is not arguing that souls receive more grace because they are more holy, but that they receive more grace, and indeed are thereby more holy, because they are of different natures. At an allegorical level, he is also arguing by this structure that the nature of our blessedness is constituted and

understood by a number of essentially distinct capacities or activities, embodied piecemeal in the diverse capacities of the souls in their spheres. Given how important it is to Dante, it should not come as a surprise that he does not rely solely on poetic embodiment—which, by its nature, must always be ambiguous and open to misinterpretation—to express the principle. Beatrice supplies an explicit and “scientific” declaration of this principle almost immediately upon her and Dante’s arrival in Heaven.

On two occasions in the *Paradiso*, Dante spends the effort—and calls attention to it—to correct earlier statements he had made regarding celestial matters. One regards the proper arrangement of the angelic orders in the celestial hierarchy (*Par.* xxviii, 97–139); the other the origin of the “spots” (*le macchie*) that can be seen on the surface of the moon (*Par.* ii, 46–143). In both instances Dante is correcting statements made in the *Convivio*. Neither seems on its face especially important, and yet both turn out to be of the greatest significance in understanding the underlying structure of the *cantica*. In the latter instance, that of the lunar spots, it is Dante *personaggio* who himself raises the issue to Beatrice, leading her to an explicit refutation of his earlier position. The question of the lunar spots seems throughout of such little importance for its own sake as emphatically to suggest an ulterior motive in Dante’s lengthy and otherwise gratuitous treatment of the subject.³⁰ The content of the explanation with which Dante replaces his earlier position reveals the significance of the passage.

In the *Convivio* (ii, iii, 9), Dante had asserted that the dark and light patches on the surface of the moon were the result of differing densities of lunar material. At Beatrice’s prompting, he repeats the hypothesis here (*Par.* ii, 59–60), only to have her refute it and replace it with a quite different explanation. What was wrong with Dante’s original proposition, she says, is that it would reduce all questions concerning the differing appearances of celestial bodies to greater or lesser quantities of one single substance or power.

La spera ottava [of the fixed stars] vi dimostra molti
 lumi, li quali e nel quale e nel quanto
 notar si posson di diversi volti.
 Se raro e denso ciò facesser tanto,
 una sola virtù sarebbe in tutti,
 più e men distributa e altrettanto.
 (*Par.* ii, 64–69)

But, Beatrice points out, the stars possess different powers (*virtù*) from one another, and these different powers have to be the result of different formal causes. Since Dante’s position would have reduced all formal causes to one

only, it is impossible for his original position to explain the distinctive powers the stars exercise.

Virtù diverse esser convegnon frutti
di principii formali, e quei, for ch'uno,
seguiterieno a tua ragion distrutti.
(*Par.* ii, 70–72)

The true principle, she explains, is that both the existence of the stars and their powers are distributed in such a way that each star—perhaps Dante means each individual star, at the least, certainly each celestial sphere and its informing star—possesses its proper, individuated, and characterizing powers.³¹ Being, once received from the prime mover, is distributed downward to stars of lower spheres in differing formal distinctions—distinctions of essence.³²

Lo ciel seguente, c'ha tante vedute,
quell'esser parte per diverse essenze,
da lui distinte e da lui contenute.
Li altri giron per varie differenze
le distinzion che dentro da sè hanno
dispongono a lor fini e lor semenze.
(*Par.* ii, 115–20)

When a soul animates a body, it does so by distributing its operation among the different organs and members of the body. In doing so, the distinct powers the soul possesses for operation become manifest. When they do, by virtue of appearing in different organs, their differences from one another also become apparent. The same process, Beatrice asserts, occurs in the formation of the stars. As the human soul distributes the exercise of its multiple powers among its diverse organs, so the many powers possessed unitarily by God are distributed among the stars. The stars become, as it were, the organs in which the divine intelligence is displayed, but since it is diverse individual divine powers that are distributed to them, it is inevitable and natural that as they manifest the properties of the divine intelligence, they display readily distinguishable, and essentially different, properties.

E come l'alma dentro a vostra polve
per differenti membra e conformate
a diverse potenze si risolve,
così l'intelligenza sua bontate

multiplicata per le stelle spiega,
 girando sè sovra sua unitate.
 (*Par.* ii, 133–38)

It is these differences of qualitative properties that make the stars appear different, not different amounts of one single property.

Virtù diversa fa diversa lega
 col prezioso corpo ch'ella avviva,
 nel qual, sì come vita in voi, si lega.
 Per la natura lieta onde deriva,
 la virtù mista per lo corpo luce
 come letizia per pupilla viva.
 Da essa vien ciò che da luce a luce
 par differente, non da denso e raro;
 essa è il formal principio che produce,
 conforme a sua bontà, lo turbo e 'l chiaro.
 (*Par.* ii, 139–48)

Now, this discussion of the origin of lunar spots can scarcely be thought to be of any importance in itself. It takes its importance—being given where it is, before Dante has encountered even a single soul in Heaven—by being offered to us as the key to interpreting the array of souls we are soon to see. Beatrice corrects Dante regarding lunar spots in order to make explicit the principle that any differences that exist between spheres are differences of essence, differences in the natures of the planets. In their capacity to shape the characters of people, then, the character of the actions they will influence will also exhibit these differences in nature or essence. When Dante learns subsequently from Beatrice that the souls appear to him as they do for a didactic purpose, we can conclude that that purpose is both to make it easier for him to understand to which celestial influences the character of these souls' actions should be attributed, and also to array for him the complete set of distinguishably characteristic human capacities for action. And, finally, when Dante later hears from Solomon that the locations of the souls in Heaven reflect the greater or lesser degrees of grace they have been allotted, we can conclude that the hierarchy of grace that is exhibited across the corporeal Heaven of the poem has been determined according to the essentially different characters of human action as defined by the influence of each of the spheres.³³

This conclusion enables us to make a new sort of sense out of the declaration that grace is awarded beyond merit (*sovra suo valore*). For it is not only that God's grace surpasses any human merit, but it is also the case that

the grace awarded, as we can now conclude, is a function of divine, rather than human, properties distributed through the stars to human characters. Reward does not follow terrestrial human action; it follows some divine order. Because of this, some sinners, we expect, have received and will receive grace far beyond what they would have deserved on the basis of their prior actions—their merit, in any conventional sense. But at the same time, the grace received is not wholly apart from their qualities as human beings. They receive grace for having a soul of a certain nature. The proximate source of their character is the star that informed their lives (the ultimate source, of course, is God), but precisely by being informed by that star their actions took on its distinct character. Grace does not follow the purity or sinlessness of their actions, but it reflects their actions since those actions were informed by the character of soul each individual had been given and then freely actualized by choice.³⁴

NOTES

1. See, for example,

O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani,
mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
sotto 'l velame de li versi strani.
(*Inf.* ix, 61–63)

And

Aguzza qui, lettor, ben li occhi al vero,
chè 'l velo è ora ben tanto sottile,
certo che 'l trapassar dentro è leggero.
(*Purg.* viii, 19–21)

2. Cf. Freccero, “*Paradiso* X: The Dance of the Stars,” *Dante Studies* 86 (1968): 85–111, esp. p. 86: “Unlike any other part of the poem, the *Paradiso* at this point [*Par.* iv, 40–42] can claim no more than a purely *ad hoc* reality.” See also Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Teologia ed Esegese Biblica (*Par.* III–V),” in *Dante e la Bibbia* (Firenze: Olschki, 1988), pp. 95–112.

3. Cf. Francis X. Newman, “St. Augustine’s Three Visions and the Structure of the *Commedia*,” *MLN* 82 (1967): 56–78, esp. pp. 73–74.

4. Given the literal story, we might be tempted to consider that the nature of the rewards of the blessed can be seen in their literal actions in the narrative. However, not only do the declarations of Beatrice and Benedict render such a notion impossible, but we should also recall that in the *Letter to Can Grande* Dante continues to speak of both a literal and an allegorical level to the *Paradiso*. What the narrative shows literally, according to the letter, is the *status* of the blessed souls after death, but it is in the allegory that Dante says he describes their rewards as the just reflection of the merit of their free choices (*Ep.* xiii, 25).

5. Cf. 4 *Sent.*, 49, 1.

6. See also Bruno Nardi, "I Bambini nella candida rosa dei beati," in *Nel Mondo di Dante* (Roma: Edizioni "Storia e Letteratura," 1944), pp. 317–34 (originally published in *Studi danteschi*, vol. 20).

7. Cf. *SCG*, iii, 58: "Since the mode of operation follows the form which is the principle of operation, and since the principle of that vision by which the created intellect sees the divine substance is that certain light which was spoken of before . . . [and since] it is possible for there to be different degrees of participation in this light, so [it is possible] that one intellect be more perfectly illuminated than another, Therefore it is possible that one of those who see God may see Him more perfectly than another, although both see His substance." Also, Singleton, "The Three Lights," in *Journey to Beatrice* (originally published as *Dante Studies* 2) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 15–38.

8. *ST*, Suppl. 93, 2. But see 4 *Sent.*, 49, 3.

9. Vazzana, *Il Contrapasso*, pp. 6–7, argues for the artistic need for a single principle of the *contrapasso*. The proper principle, however, is not so much in the figure, as it were, of the treatment of souls in the afterlife (because he looks for such a figure he runs into the error of trying to take the corrections of Purgatory as the image of their vices, rather than of their opposed virtues), but in the content: to each what he or she most wished. Vazzana himself enunciates this principle of not only justice but love in a passage previously quoted, *Il Contrapasso*, p. 34.

10. Cf. Waddell, *Friends of God*, pp. 58–59.

11. See also *de Trin.*, xiii, 14 (18); and *ST*, 3a 1, 2 and ad 2; 3a 46, 1 ad 3. See also Richard of St. Victor, *Liber de Verbo incarnato*, c. 8.

12. Their cases, however, although striking in their unexpectedness—and especially dramatic in Siger's case, given the fierce condemnation of him by Thomas Aquinas while both were alive—may not be altogether clear cut, since the relatively short period of time between their deaths and Dante's sight of them in the *Paradiso* (especially true of Siger, though Joachim's death is not long in the purgatorial terms we have encountered in the second *cantica*, even if he had spent all of the time in Purgatory, which we have no reason to believe) apparently indicates that Dante largely absolves them of sin despite their heterodox writings. See also Renaudet, *Dante humaniste*, pp. 262–68 and 272. Kenelm Foster, "The Celebration of Order: *Paradiso* X," *Dante Studies* 90 (1972): 109–24, esp. pp. 120–21, argues that Siger represents a certain kind of wisdom worth representing in Heaven. More attractive, I believe, is the conclusion that the principle of judgment is not a human one. We know from the placement of Saladin, Averroës, and Avicenna in Limbo that Dante did not see believing in the wrong doctrines itself a sin. The heterodoxy of Siger's writings, therefore, would be irrelevant from such a perspective. Siger is rewarded for his capacities, not his conclusions.

13. Of Constantine, Dante unsparingly says that from his gift "avvegna che sia 'l mondo indi distrutto" (*Par.* xx, 60), though the gift itself is described as "il suo bene operar" (verse 59). Hezekiah's final action as king would lead Isaiah to say: "Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (Isa. 39:6–7, KJV). To which Hezekiah replied: "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. He said moreover, For there shall be peace and truth in my

days" (Isa. 39:8). Cf. 2 Kings 20:16–19 and 2 Chron. 32:31. But in his rule Hezekiah "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did" (2 Kings 18:3; cf. 2 Chron. 29:2). Richard Kay points to Hezekiah's need for repentance to prolong his life, indicating thereby the commission of actions that demanded repentance, *Dante's Christian Astrology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 214. Cf. Renaudet, *Dante humaniste*, p. 206.

14. Renaudet, *Dante humaniste*, p. 203, cites Trajan as a persecutor of Christians, and we should note that even this does not disqualify him from Heaven.

15. See *Singleton* at *Par.* xx, 46–48, 49–54, 61–66, and 67–72.

16. Ironically—from a human perspective—Nathan, the prophet who denounced David's adultery and murder (2 Kings 12: 1–10), is rewarded in a sphere of Heaven lower than David is (*Par.* xii, 136). Cf. Renaudet, *Dante humaniste*, p. 271.

17. See the commentaries of the Anonimo Fiorentino, Vandelli (citing Fra Giordano), and Chimenz (at *Par.* iv, 49–54: DDP).

18. See the comments of Sapegno (at *Par.* iv, 58–60: DDP).

19. Dante attributed his own genius to the action of the stars and, from the direct tone in which he expressed it, did not expect that this would appear strange to his readers.

O gloriose stelle, o lume pregno
di gran virtù, dal quale io riconosco
tutto, qual che si sia, il mio ingegno.
(*Par.* xxiii, 112–14)

See also *Purg.* xvi, 73, and *Par.* ii, 67. Cf. Paolo Pecoraro, *Le Stelle di Dante, saggio d'interpretazione di riferimenti astronomici e cosmografici della Divina Commedia* (Roma: Bulzoni editore, 1987), pp. 21 and 299, and *passim*. Also M. A. Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, rev. ed. (London: Allan Wingate, 1956), pp. 144–48 and 318–24; and G. Buti and R. Bertagni, *Commento astronomico della Divina Commedia* (Firenze: Remo Sandron, 1966), pp. 78 and 218.

20. Cf. *ST*, la 115, 4; also *SCG*, iii, 85–92. See Thomas Litt, *Les Corps célestes dans l'univers de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1963), esp. pp. 201–14. The question is of importance to us, for Aquinas' interpretation did not allow to stars or their spheres any direct influence over the intellect or will, or any other faculty that by being incorporeal could endure in Heaven. On this issue, there is no way to avoid concluding that at the literal level of the *Commedia* Dante appears to be in disagreement with Aquinas, insofar as he attributes far more extensive powers to the stars. (It is important to stress that the disagreement may exist only at the *literal* level of the poem. The underlying allegorical principle of the *Commedia* is that physical manifestations are used to exhibit spiritual states, and that is especially true for the *Paradiso*, where everything Dante sees is explicitly stated to be manifested as it is for didactic purposes. It is possible that Dante's allocation of characters to spheres is simply another such poetic embodiment. Dante might actually agree with Aquinas that the stars influence only the materially linked parts of the soul, yet still use this physical influence and the order of the celestial spheres as an image of corresponding incorporeal dispositions of the spiritual capacities of the soul which we discovered in the *Purgatorio*, and their order of merit.) Moreover, Aquinas was willing to attribute some considerable indirect influence: "However

much celestial bodies act directly on inferior bodies and change them by their own power, nevertheless they act only accidentally on powers associated to organs; not acting by way of necessitating anything, but only of inclining. We may say that a certain man is irascible (that is, prone to anger) because of celestial causes; but he is irascible directly because of the free choice made by his will" (*In Matthæum Evangelistam Expositio*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. S. E. Fretté [Paris: Vivès, 1876], vol. 19, c. 2). See also *ST*, 1a2æ 9, 5, and Tullio Gregory, "Astrologia e teologia nella cultura medievale," in *Mundana sapientia: Forme di conoscenza nella cultura medievale* (Roma: Storia e letteratura, 1992), pp. 291–328, p. 314 fn. 63.

21. Cf. Richard Kay, "Astrology and Astronomy," pp. 148 and 150–51. Also, Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, "Dante et les astrologues de son temps," *Bulletin de la Société d'études dantesques du Centre universitaire méditerranéen* (Nice) 19 (1970): 3–15, esp. p. 5.

22. The simile of the spheres' imprinting their properties on the character of humans born under their influence like a seal's impressing its design on wax can be found repeatedly in Retoro d'Arezzo, *La Composizione del mondo colle sue cacioni*, ed. Alberto Morino (Firenze: L'Accademia della Crusca, 1976), for example, ii, 6.1.2, and ii, 6.3.1. On the imprint of the stars' overcoming heredity, see Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, p. 323. Cf. Edward Moore, "The Astronomy of Dante," in *Studies in Dante, Third Series* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1903), pp. 1–108, esp. pp. 20–21.

23. Cf. *Conv.*, iii, ii, 4: "Every substantial form proceeds from its first cause, which is God, as is written in the *de Causis*. Nor does a substantial form receive any diversity from its first cause, which is most simple. It receives its diversity from its secondary causes, and from the matter in which it descends." The action of the spheres is essential for Dante, for the divine origin of every human soul is again something all human souls have in common. What distinguishes them must be attributed to secondary causes, as the passage from the *Convivio* states. In the context of the *Commedia*, it can only be the spheres that account for the different characters of humans. See Nardi, "Le Citazioni dantesche del 'Liber de Causis'," p. 107. Also, Stephen Bemrose, *Dante's Angelic Intelligences* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1983), p. 91: "Dante certainly believed the heavens to be involved in the *generation* of men (as opposed to the creation of their rational souls, which is a direct act of God)."

24. Richard Kay, "Astrology and Astronomy," pp. 150–51, argues that Charles Martel's two paired examples at *Paradiso* viii, 124–26 (Solon and Xerxes, Melchiselek and Dædalus), show the relation of stars and free will, and the room left to the will. The stars give people their talents, which they, in turn, are free to use well or badly.

25. Cf. Bruno Nardi, "Il Canto XXIX del 'Paradiso,'" *Convivium* n.s. 3 (1956): 294–302, esp. p. 294: "... gli spiriti beati cominciano a rivelarsi a Dante, dal cielo della Luna fino a quel di Saturno, nel pianeta dalla cui virtù sono stati più fortemente impressi."

26. When God by action of the stars imprints or forms a person's character, that imprint in effect determines the individual's ultimate location in Heaven, if the person reaches Heaven, since the location of souls in Heaven reflects the characteristic influences of their stars. But the determination of character does not guarantee that a person will attain Heaven: that remains for the operation of the individual's free will. The destiny of infants and young children in Heaven is a special case

that confirms this principle. Such children (*questa festinata gente*), according to Dante, are granted greater and lesser grace, just as adults are, but, given that they never had the opportunity to perform any meaningful actions in the world (having died before reaching an age at which they could be said freely to have chosen their actions), their differential rewards cannot reflect any actual actions they took while alive. Rather, Dante says, their rewards were fixed by the natures they had at their birth (*nel primiero acume*)—that is, their rewards correspond to their capacities for action, or character. It is that innate capacity that reflects, better or worse, God's image (*suo lieto aspetto*). See Nardi, "Bambini," pp. 328–29: "Ma se questa infusione di grazia è 'sanza merzè di lor costume', cioè senza il merito delle buone opere, non è senza proporzione alle disposizioni naturali onde l'anima di ciascuno è più o meno 'apparecchiata a riceverne'. Insomma la grazia rispetta la diversa fisionomia psicologica di ogni bambino e la diversa personalità che potenzialmente si cela in ciascuno di essi."

E però questa festinata gente
a vera vita non è sine causa
intra sì qui più e meno eccellente.

.....
[L]e menti tutte nel suo lieto aspetto
creando, a suo piacer di grazia dota
diversamente; e qui basti l'effetto.

.....
Dunque, senza merzè di for costume,
locati son per gradi differenti,
sol differendo nel primiero acume.
(*Par.* xxxii, 58–60, 64–66, 73–75)

See also Nardi, "Il Canto XXIX del *Paradiso*," esp. pp. 294–95.

27. Cf. Bruno Nardi, "'Si come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,'" in *Nel Mondo di Dante*, pp. 337–50 (originally published in *Studi danteschi*, vol. 19), esp. p. 348: "Nel concetto cristiano e dantesco della beatitudine eterna, v'è la preoccupazione costante di mantenere intatta la personalità individuale di ogni spirito creato."

28. Cf. Luigi Mario Capelli, "Le 'Gerarchie angeliche' e la struttura morale del 'Paradiso' dantesco," *Giornale dantesco* 6 (n.s. 3) (1898): 241–59, esp. p. 248, citing Ronchetti: "I beati non soggiornano già nei diversi pianeti, ma vi fanno solo una breve apparizione, allo scopo esclusivo di mostrarsi al Poeta, significando in pari tempo la tendenza prevalente del loro spirito in vita (*tendenza che la loro beatitudine ha ora spogliata di ogni colpalità*)" (emphasis added).

29. Cf. 4 *Sent.*, 49, 2.

30. Cf. Maria Corti, *Percorsi dell'invenzione, il linguaggio poetico e Dante* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), chap. 6, "Metafisica della luce come poesia," esp. pp. 154–59. Also Singleton at *Par.* ii, 148; and Steiner and Grabher (at *Par.* ii, 148: DDP).

31. Cf. Nardi, "Le Citazioni dantesche del 'Liber de Causis,'" pp. 97, 103, and *Ep.* xiii, 53–61. Cf. Weisheipl, "Celestial Movers," p. 319, and Orr, *Dante and the Early Astronomers*, p. 321.

32. Cf. Seung, *Fragile Leaves*, pp. 102–5.

33. See Nardi, "Il Canto XXIX del 'Paradiso,'" p. 294. Cf. *Conv.*, iv, xxi, 4–10.

34. Again, the diverse grades of grace awarded children—who had no opportunity to act well or badly—demonstrate that grace follows character rather than action. See Nardi, “Bambini,” p. 328: “Ogni fanciullo possiede, sia pure allo stato latente, una sua propria individualità e personalità, chè è il fondamento, posta da natura, di tutte le disuguaglianze sociali. Alla naturale disuguaglianza nel grado di nobilità, egli [Dante] inoltre fa corrispondere una differente elargizione di grazia.”

R. W. B. LEWIS

Dante's Beatrice and the New Life of Poetry

In the *Vita Nuova*, the remarkable blend of reminiscence and poetic excursion put together in the early 1290s, Dante tells of his first glimpse of Beatrice—she being at the start of her ninth year, as he calculates, and he near the end of his. “She appeared humbly and properly dressed,” he remembers, “in a most noble color, crimson girded and adorned in the manner that befitted her so youthful age”—adorned, it may be supposed, with a wreath of flowers suitable for the occasion and for her youth. It was then that the boy’s entire being yielded to the supreme power of Love, as the poet would describe the experience in his later idiom.

Following Love’s command, Dante sought out Beatrice “many times in my childhood”; sought her out in the walkways of the *sestiere* and even more in the little church of Santa Margherita, the parish church of the Portinaris, where Beatrice came to pray with her mother and Monna Tessa almost every morning. Here Dante could sit not ten feet away and gaze at her in silent ardor. Gradually, he came to see in her “such noble and laudable bearing that of her could certainly be said those words of the poet Homer: ‘She seemed no child of mortal man but of God.’”

With the passing of days, Dante’s rudimentary education went forward, in a local school perhaps, and sometimes with a private tutor. He evidently read Priscian, the sixth-century Latin grammarian (he puts Priscian in Hell

From *New England Review: Middlebury Series* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 69–80. Copyright © 2001 by R.W.B. Lewis.

alongside Brunetto Latini and the other sodomites, but this may be in part a case of mistaken identity), as well as a book of moral instruction that he learned by rote, the fables of Aesop, and a treatise on polite behavior. The medieval Latin he was introduced to proved a hindrance rather than a help to the reading of Virgil, Cicero, and Boethius a decade afterward, under the guidance of Latini. But Dante absorbed everything—philosophy, theology, literature, history—and forgot nothing; and his visual imagination was being stirred constantly by wanderings in the interiors of the great churches of Florence and the bridges and the distending vistas of river and hills that they afforded.

There seems to have been no question at any time of a formal engagement between Dante and Beatrice Portinari. Such matters were entirely the province of the parents, and the Alighieris and Portinaris had other plans. On February 9, 1277, one of the few dates in Dante's early life that can be established with precision, Dante was formally betrothed to Gemma Donati, the daughter of Manetto Donati. Dante was not yet twelve; Gemma was about ten. But it was a binding contract of marriage; breaking an engagement was a major offense in Florence, and, as is clear in numerous cases, could lead to murderous revenge and civil violence. A ring was placed on Gemma's finger; and she brought to the ceremony a dowry described as twice the customary amount.

It was a large sum, but rather modest in view of the enormous wealth of the Donati family. It had made its name as early as 1065 by founding a hospital near the church of San Piero Maggiore (it was later transferred to the Vallombrosa hills). The Donatis were generous patrons of the parish churches of San Martino and Santa Margherita. Their lordly houses and towers dominated the Corso, and one of their houses shared a rear wall with the house in which Dante was born.

Sheer proximity of property and residence was most likely a prime reason for the betrothal. In addition to being next-door neighbors in Florence, the Donatis and Alighieris owned adjoining agricultural territory in Pagnolle; Dante and Gemma could have waved to each other many a time across the fields. And there was already a family relation of sorts: Manetto's grandfather Uberti, the founder of that branch of the clan, had married one of the daughters of Bellincione Berti and was thus a brother-in-law of Alighiero I, Dante's great-grandfather. (According to Cacciaguیدا, Uberti was much displeased that Berti then gave him one of the contemptible Adimaris as another brother-in-law.)

Manetto Donati was a kindly individual, ready to help out financially at later moments. His daughter Gemma was a serious, steady girl, so one gathers, nice-looking if not of such beauty as to make the pulse throb. Some eight years after the civil contract was signed in 1277, there would be a religious ceremony, and the young couple would take up their life together. Dante

never once mentions his wife Gemma in any of his writings, nor are there any sly hints of domestic discontent. On the purely literary level, Gemma Donati may be said to have supplied Dante with an essential requirement in the troubadour tradition that he would soon be following poetically: a faithful wife to make it impossible for him to do anything vis-à-vis his loved one except to look at her with hopeless longing.

* * *

Nine years after Dante first beheld Beatrice, and again on the first of May, in 1283, the young woman actually spoke to him. With two other ladies "of greater years," Dante says in the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice was passing along the street; she looked up to where Dante was standing frozen to the spot. "In her ineffable courtesy . . . she greeted me, such that I then seemed to see all the terms of beatitude." Feeling thus wholly blessed, Dante went home and fell asleep. In his dream he saw the figure of Love, his lord and master, holding in his arms the lady who had just greeted him, "naked except that she seemed to me wrapped in a crimson cloth." In one hand Love held Dante's heart, which he gave to the lady to eat, after which he broke into bitter weeping and, with the lady in his arms, seemed to ascend to heaven.

When he had recovered himself after waking, Dante wrote a sonnet about the dream-experience—he had already, he observes, had some self-taught practice in "the art of saying words in rhyme"—and sent copies of it around the city to the *fedeli d'Amore*, with whom Florence was packed: devotees of the lord of Love, who wrote poems to their master and recited them in little gatherings all over town.

The sonnet began:

A ciascun alma presa e gentil cuor
[To every captive soul and gentle heart]

It went on to invite his readers to give their own views on the event being described. Then Dante set forth his dream, from the appearance of Love to his departure, weeping, bearing the lady in his arms. To this missive there were many replies, with as many different readings of the vision. "Among the correspondents," Dante says, "was one whom I call first among my friends."

This was Guido Cavalcanti, who sent along a sonnet beginning:

Vedeste, al mio parere, omne valore
[You saw, in my opinion, all worth]

Having seen the lord of Love, the sonnet implies, Dante had seen all that was best, all the moral and intellectual virtues bound into a single figure. This was a handsome tribute, coming from the individual who was regarded as the most brilliant Florentine poet writing in the “new style,” and one of the city’s most striking personalities.

* * *

The intermittent courtship took several bizarre turns, if we accept Dante’s account of the affair in the *Vita Nuova*, as, on balance, we probably can. One day, Dante records, Beatrice was seated in her usual pew in Santa Margherita, with Dante stationed nearby. Halfway between them was another “gentle lady of pleasing aspect” who kept staring at him; and Dante heard someone behind him remark that this second lady had obviously “devastated” the young man. Dante immediately played this up, with the idea of using the “gentle lady” as a screen (*schermo*) for his true love. He made such a show of hiding his secret love for the screen-lady that everyone assumed that she was of course his beloved.

Dante even composed a few “little things in rhyme” for the screen-lady, though he holds back from quoting any of them. The romantic game went on for a goodly stretch—“some years and months,” in Dante’s phrase—and at one point he felt such a surge of good feeling toward the screen-lady that he resolved to speak her name openly in a poem, and did so, as he tells us, in a work that sang “the names of sixty of the most beautiful ladies in the city,” those of Beatrice and the screen-lady buried in the inventory.

But there came a day when the screen-lady was obliged to leave Florence and “journey to a faraway city.” Dante, worried that people would be suspicious if he did not make a show of grief, devised a rather prosaic sonnet, which began:

O you who along the way of Love
pass by, attend and see
if there be any grief as heavy as mine.

In the *Vita Nuova*, Dante does not hint at the fact that during this same time—in 1286 or thereabouts—he fulfilled his marriage contract with Gemma Donati, in the traditional religious ceremony in the Church of San Martino del Vescovo. They began their life together in the Alighieri house across the way. Their first child, Giovanni, was born apparently in 1287.

* * *

But let us go back a year or two, to the moment when the screen-lady departed for a distant city. Dante, riding away one afternoon on a short journey, was visited by another vision of Love: of that being whom he regarded, or pretended to regard, as a separate entity, but which he gradually acknowledged to be a fantasizing part of himself. Love, this time, was dressed as a poor pilgrim, and he had new counsel to give. What Dante needed, he said, was a follow-up screen-lady, "who will be your defense as was the first one." Love named his candidate for the role, and Dante recognized her at once. He then set about courting her so openly and insistently that people began to talk reprovingly about him. Hearing such talk, Beatrice, passing Dante in the street one day, withheld her greeting. Dante was stricken to the core.

One senses in Beatrice's behavior a certain maturity of mind, even a slight hardening of character. It was probably due to her new state, the married state. At some time in late 1287, so it seems, Beatrice Portinari was married to Simone de' Bardi and went to live with him in his family home in the Oltrarno.

The Bardis were a highly successful merchant clan, experts in banking and wool-making. Their houses and towers stretched along a street—it is now called Via de' Bardi—that curved upward from the Ponte Vecchio area, running parallel to the river and then descending to a point near the Ponte Rubiconte. The Bardis would experience grave trouble forty-odd years later, when a pointless entanglement with young Edward III of England led to bankruptcy. Half a century after that, Cosimo de' Medici, principal founder of the Medici dynasty, was happy to take as his wife Contessina de' Bardi.

Beatrice at twenty-one was the second wife of Simone de' Bardi. She brought with her as dowry six hundred lire in gold florins, four times the amount Gemma Donati had contributed for marrying into the Alighieri family. Beatrice now lived, not virtually next door, but on the far side of the Arno, and Dante had to walk through town and across the river to catch glimpses of her.

Meanwhile, wandering in a haze of self-reproach, Dante had still another vision of Love, on this occasion as a young man dressed in white. Love tells him—or, as we may say, Dante now told himself—to stop playacting and instead write "certain words in rhyme" to Beatrice herself, words that would make clear "how you have been hers ever since childhood." Dante responded with "*Ballata, i' voi*," which begins:

Ballad, I want you to seek out Love,
and go with him before my lady,
so that my excuse, which you must sing,
My Lord may then recount to her.

“She who must hear you,” the ballad continues, “as I believe is angry with me.” Love must tell his lady that Dante has been steadfast from the first in his love for her, and “never has he strayed.”

To this, Dante added the sonnet “All my thoughts speak of love.” Then, by chance, a friend came by to take Dante to a local gathering. A number of young ladies had gathered together in the house of a newly married woman: it being the custom in Florence, Dante explains, for ladies to keep a bride company “the first time she would sit at the dining-table in the house of her new bridegroom.” As he stood there gazing at the group, Dante felt a tremor seize him, so strong that he had to lean back against a painting that covered the wall behind him. The seizure was caused by his suddenly recognizing Beatrice among the ladies. The others, observing Dante’s condition, began to make fun of him among themselves, and evidently Beatrice joined in.

When he had recovered somewhat, Dante wrote a grieving sonnet about the experience, “*Con l’altre donne mia vista gabbate*”:

With the other ladies you mock my aspect;
and you do not think, lady, whence it comes
that I resemble a figure so strange
when I behold your beauty.
If you knew it, Pity could
no longer hold against me her wonted obstinacy . . .

In two further sonnets, Dante tried to explain his condition. “When I come to see you,” he says in the first,

My face shows the color of my heart;
which, failing, leans wherever it can,
and through the intoxication caused by great trembling,
the stones seem to shout “Die, die.”

The second one concludes:

. . . I struggle, seeking to help myself;
and all pale, of all valor empty,
I come to see you, thinking to be healed;
and if I raise my eyes to look,
in my heart arises a tremor
that from my pulses causes the soul to part.

These lyrical excursions, be it remembered, were written at the times—1287, 1288, 1289—and under the circumstances described by Dante. It was only later, in the mid-1290s, that they were brought together in the work called the *Vita Nuova*, an extraordinary composite of poetry and narrative, and given the places they occupy now in Dante's account of his love of Beatrice from her childhood to her death.

In the wake of these three confessional sonnets, and after considerable inner debate, Dante arrived at a major turning point in his life. This moment also comprised the first of two critical turning points in the *Vita Nuova*. The narrative is particularly rich in these sections (XVII–XIX) and may be quoted from at some length.

Because of the discouraging reception of the poems addressed to Beatrice, Dante says, he resolved to “keep silent.” He would no longer speak directly to her. He would, instead, “take up new matter,” something “more noble than the previous. And because the reason for taking up the new matter is delightful (*dilettevole*) to hear, I will recount it as briefly as I can.”

He then tells of encountering a company of young ladies one day, Beatrice (he noted carefully) not among them, and heard one of them call him by name, asking why he continued to love Beatrice, since she made him so unhappy. Dante replied:

Ladies, the end of my love was indeed the greeting of this lady, of whom you are perhaps thinking, and in that greeting lay my beatitude, for it was the end of all my desires. But because it pleased her to deny it to me, my Lord Love in his mercy has placed all my beatitude in that which cannot fail me.

The ladies murmur among themselves, amid many sighs, until his interlocutor asks Dante to explain where the new beatitude lies. And Dante answers, “In words that praise my lady.”

He had said it: his happiness now lay in writing poetry in praise of his lady. But he held back for some time, fearful of making a poor beginning. Then one day, as he walked down a road with a stream running alongside, it occurred to him that he should speak of Beatrice only by speaking to other women—to gentle ladies and “not just women.” There came into his head an opening phrase: “*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*.” Back home, he pondered this phrase for some time before beginning the canzone that, by any reckoning, was his first genuine poetic triumph.

The first words may be quoted in Dante's Tuscan Italian:

Donne, ch'avete intelletto d'amore,
 i' vo' con voi de la mia donna dire,
 non perch'io creda sua laude finire,
 ma ragionar per isfogar la mente.
 [Ladies who have an understanding of love,
 I wish to speak to you of my lady,
 not that I believe I may exhaust her praise,
 but to converse to ease my mind.]

Dante sets the tone of his song of praise:

And I do not wish to speak so loftily
 as to become through daring inept,
 but will speak of her gentle estate
 with respect for her discreetly.

In the second section of the seventy-line canzone, Dante, as he says in his gloss, tells "what is understood of [Beatrice] in heaven"—"The lady is desired in highest heaven"—and "what is understood on earth":

when she goes along the way,
 into villainous hearts Love casts a chill,
 whereby all their thoughts freeze and perish.

In the last section, Dante sends his poem on its way:

Canzone, I know that you will go forth speaking
 to many ladies after I have released you . . .
 Strive, if you can, to open yourself
 only to ladies and to men of courtly ways.

There is a fluidity and grace in the poem (as may well be detected in Dino Cervigni's beautifully attuned translation¹) beyond anything Dante had yet written, and a fresh vitality of language. The canzone may be said to have inaugurated a new mode of lyric poetry in Italy: the *dolce stil nuovo*, as it came to be called. The phrase is that of Dante, who puts it into the mouth of the poet Bonagiunta da Lucca, with whom he converses on the next to last terrace of Purgatory. Bonagiunta asks him if he is the one who "invented the new rhyming, beginning with '*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*.'" Dante in reply offers a classically high-toned account of himself "I am one who, when Love inspires me, takes note, and, in the manner in which he dictates within me, goes setting it out" (*vo significando*). Now, says Bonagiunta, he

understands what it was that held him and others back from “the sweet new style (*dolce stil nuovo*) of which I have heard.”

Dante himself named as his most honored predecessor in the new style Guido Guinizelli of Bologna, a poet who died in exile (he was a Ghibelline adherent) in 1276. Dante never knew him in real life, though during the short visit Dante paid to Bologna (in the fall of 1287, it would appear), he could talk with poetic affiliates and students of Guido, be directed to his poems, and absorb the atmosphere in which he had flourished. But Dante does meet him in Purgatory (xxvi), not long after the exchange with Bonagiunta. The figure comes forward with a singularly engaging self-identification: “*Son Guido Guinizelli e già mi purgo*” [I am Guido Guinizelli, and already I cleanse myself] (the English is less rhythmic). Dante addresses Guido as his father, *padre mio*, joining him with Virgil and Brunetto Latini in the visionary paternity. He adds that Guido was also the poetic father of others better than himself—no doubt thinking of Guido Cavalcanti and Lapo Gianni. Why, asks Guinizelli, does Dante hold him so highly? And Dante answers:

your sweet songs
which so long as modern use shall last
will make their very ink precious.

“Modern use” (*uso moderno*) was none other than the sweet new style, which in Dante’s lifetime succeeded the Provençal and Sicilian styles, along with that of the voluminous Guittone d’Arezzo—with their various characteristics of languidness, hardness, or obscurity—that had dominated lyric poetry in Italy for many decades. The leading voices in the *stil nuovo* were the Florentines Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, and Dante, as Dante declared on many occasions, and never more sweetly than in the sonnet beginning: “*Guido i’ vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io. . .*”

The new style practiced by these three, following Guido Guinizelli of Bologna, was poetry in praise of the loved one, without a trace of bravado, totally bereft of irony or double-edged wit, and emanating from “the gentle heart.” Love and the gentle heart—this is the very theme of one of Guinizelli’s best-known poems:

Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore . . .
[The gentle heart betakes itself always to love . . .]

Dante echoed the thought in a sonnet composed at the request of a friend (Forese Donati, perhaps) who had been much moved by Dante’s canzone

"*Donne, ch'avete intelletto d'amore*," and who wanted Dante to tell him more simply "what love is." The sonnet's opening lines:

Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa,
 sì com il saggio in suo dittare pone,
 [Love and the gentle heart are but a single thing,
 even as the sage pronounces in his poem.]

Dante, speaking to the sage Guinizelli in Purgatory, refers to Guinizelli's "sweet songs" (he calls them *detti*, which might be translated "sayings"), and the musical charm of his new sonnet is further tribute to his forerunner.

* * *

We have arrived at mid-fall 1289. Dante had gone through an exceedingly active summer, on the battlefield at Campaldino and in the siege at Caprona, with the strenuous preparations and journeying for the two events. The military exploits, however, found no immediate outlet in his poetry, though war memories would recur in the *Comedy*. It is as though Dante's spirit now cherished something far removed from the derring-do of war. The sweetness and gentleness of the new poetry, that is, was an aesthetic reaction to the months preceding. But Dante in his young manhood—he was now twenty-four—was increasingly given to vibrantly shifting impulses, to major changes of attention. His emerging greatness as a personality lay partly in the coexistence of these large divergent impulses and in his capacity to move his whole being from one to another. The American reader may think perhaps of Walt Whitman, who could perform simultaneously or successively as a poet of cosmic range and unexcelled inventiveness, as an uncannily shrewd commentator on the drift of social and political democracy, as a lover, and as a recorder of war.

External events, of course, affected Dante's shifts of focus. He wrote a sonnet elaborating on the theme of the now famous canzone and with the same musical lilt:

Ne li occhi porta la mia donna Amore . . .
 [In her eyes my lady brings Love,
 whereby is ennobled everything she looks upon.]

And then, not many months later, Dante learned of the death of Folco Portinari, Beatrice's father and a man, Dante said, who was "in the highest degree good." We know from existing records that Portinari died on December 31, 1289.

From this moment on, death is the countertheme with love in the *Vita Nuova*. Death had made an appearance earlier, in section VIII, when a young woman friend of Beatrice's had died and Dante duly wrote a commemorative sonnet, "Weep, lovers, since love weeps." But after Portinari's demise, death is a constantly lingering presence up through the actual death of Beatrice herself, only six months later.

Dante felt called upon to write some lines for the heartbroken daughter of Portinari, and he contrived two sonnets, the first and more compelling of which begins:

You who bear your aspect downcast,
with eyes lowered, showing sorrow,
whence do you come that your color
appears changed into pity's own?

"A few days after that," Dante related, "it happened that in a part of my body I was seized by a dolorous illness, from which continuously for nine days I suffered bitterest pain." We may question the "nine days"—every arithmetical calculation in Dante's writing is a multiple of three, by astrological necessity—but it was a drawn-out illness and may have been something like rheumatic fever. He falls prey to feverish fantasies of death—his own death, announced by a horde of disheveled women, then the death of Beatrice—"dead lies our lady"—followed by visions of darkening skies, earthquakes, birds falling to the ground—the end of the world.

But even as he wept fever-clouded tears, Dante had another vision, of Beatrice in heaven, with a look of such humility and peacefulness that Dante calls out, "Sweet Death, come to me, and be not unkind, for you must be noble." He comes slowly back to reality, to find "a lady, young and gentle" standing at his bedside, weeping with compassion. It is his sister (her name has vanished), one "joined to me by the closest blood relation" (rather than his half-sister Tana).

The other ladies ask his sister to leave, and in answer to their questioning, Dante gradually reveals the entire "false imagining," as he calls it, holding back only the name of Beatrice.

When he had fully recovered, Dante wrote a canzone about what had happened to him, alluding at the start to his grieving sister:

Donna pietosa e di novella etate,
adorna assai di gentilezze umane . . .
[A lady compassionate and young,
richly adorned with gentle qualities]

who was there, where often I called on Death,
 seeing my eyes filled with pain,
 and hearing my empty words,
 was moved by fear to bitter weeping.

The canzone chants its way through eighty-four lines, and before it is through Dante has told again of his sickbed experience, his “false imagining” (he repeats the phrase) of his death and Beatrice’s and the end of all things, and then the extraordinary transformation of vision and spirit when Beatrice appears to him sublimely at peace, with Death as something sweet and noble.

This is the second crucial turning point in the *Vita Nuova*, and, it is not too much to say, in Dante’s understanding of the meaning of life and death. Francis Fergusson provides the compelling insight that in a radical departure from the romantic medieval tradition of love and death identified together “with the mystic sweetness of night and the void,” Dante now *welcomes* and praises death as the passage into immortality. “At the end the sweetness of death signifies his faith in Beatrice’s immortality,” Fergusson says, “thereby bringing about a reaffirmation of the human being, and restoring the poet to the waking world with a new sanity.”

The new sanity expressed itself in a series of happy-hearted sonnets, and, following the first of them, in a discourse on the nature of poetic language. Dante had imaged Love as a human being, approaching him in the street, smiling and talking. He now knows perfectly well that Love is not a separate entity but something emanating from the soul, and that it is the privilege of poets writing in the vernacular to use such fanciful figures—so long as they can explain them. He and Guido Cavalcanti, Dante says, are familiar with some poets who fail to explain and who “rhyme senselessly.” The third sonnet is particularly captivating.

Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare
 la donna mia quand’ ella altrui saluta

The words delicately resonate:

So gentle and so honest appears
 my lady when she greets others
 that every tongue, trembling, becomes mute,
 and eyes dare not look at her.

The winter of 1290 passed, and the spring, and there arrived the day when Dante learned that Beatrice really had died. By one of his most complex calculations, invoking the Syrian calendar (which began in October) and "the perfect number nine" being completed "nine times," Dante tells us that Beatrice died in June 1290. He will not in this place dwell upon the event, because his language would be inadequate "to deal with it properly."

He did compose a tearstained poem, a "rueful canzone," as he called it, and bade it go from him, weeping, to find the ladies left disconsolate by the death of Beatrice. After this, he was visited by one of Beatrice's brothers, who had apparently become one of the poet's best friends, and for whom he wrote a sonnet purportedly about the departure of some other lady.

But after an interval, Dante did more than write an occasional poem of memorial grief; he put together the work to which he gave the title *La Vita Nuova di Dante Alighieri*. It was essentially an act of compilation, probably begun in 1293 and finished two years later. Dante drew up a narrative account of his relationship with Beatrice Portinari, from his first sight of her at the May Day party in 1274 to her death sixteen years later, sprinkling through it the poems—canzones, sonnets, a ballad—written to enshrine each successive moment. A few of these poems may have been written in the 1290s, in order to complete the presentation, but most of them were composed at the times described.

But "Dante the maker" (to borrow the title of William Anderson's very fine study) was wholly in command as the compilation took shape, and the result is a beautifully paced work, rhythmically rising and falling, with a prologue and three main acts. In the prologue, Dante recounts his first two meetings with Beatrice, through the epochal greeting in 1283. The first act comes to its climax in section xix with the canzone "*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*"; the second reaches its peak with the canzone "*Donna pietosa e di novella etate*" in section xxiii. The third portion, deliberately indecisive and perhaps a little overextended, passes through the death of Beatrice and its aftermath.

* * *

A little more than a year after Beatrice's death, while Dante was sitting in some public place, thinking painful thoughts, he happened to look up at the building opposite. "I then saw a gentle lady, young and very beautiful, who from a window watched me so compassionately, to judge by her look, that all pity seemed to be generated in her." Before long, Dante found himself addressing a sonnet to the window-lady:

My eyes saw how much pity
had appeared on your face . . .

In the days following, Dante sought out the unnamed young woman, until sorrowful appreciation turned to positive desire and delight. It is an unexpected though humanly understandable episode—Beatrice will scold him roundly for it when they meet in the Earthly Paradise (an important stage in the long process, acted out in the *Comedy*, of Dante's self-confrontation)—but aesthetically unclear. It lasts through sections xxxv–xxxviii, until Dante argues himself out of the obsession. He is now visited by a powerful new imagining: the vision of Beatrice as she was on that first May Day, “With the crimson vestments in which she first appeared before my eyes.”

The poetic story is now complete; the Dante of 1274, entranced observer of Beatrice, is merged with the Dante of 1295, memoirist, poet, lover. He resolves “to write no more of this blessed one until I could more worthily treat of her.” Should God permit him to live long enough, he will “say of her what was never said of any other woman.” After this foreshadowing of some enormous poetic endeavor, the work ends with the inscription:

Here ends
the
New Life
of
Dante Alighieri.

The new life is above all the life of Dante as a poet: one who has found in the writing of poetry the great purpose of his existence. In his new state of being, his understanding has been fortified as well by a vision of life eternal.

NOTE

1. The versions I have quoted throughout are taken from Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, Italian text with facing English translation by Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta, University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

LLOYD HOWARD

The Destination: Dante's Eyes Fixed and Attentive

On the shore of Purgatory, Dante asks his newly arrived friend Casella to stop a while so that they can talk. Out of his love for Dante, Casella agrees to stay his steps, which prompts a second request. Provided that no new laws of Purgatory have taken from Casella his ability to remember and reproduce the “amoroso canto” [“amorous song”], would Casella sing Dante a song, like those which used to soothe all his pains?¹ Casella complies, and Virgil and all the penitent souls are stilled, “fissi e attenti” [“fixed and attentive”] to the notes of one of Dante’s *canzoni*, *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* [*Love that discourses in my mind*], sung sweetly by Casella.² They are rapt and oblivious to all their new surroundings until Cato sharply reproaches them for having delayed when they should have hastened to the mountain immediately upon reaching shore.

At the top of the mountain of Purgatory when at the behest of the three theological Virtues Beatrice finally reveals herself fully to her “fedele” [“faithful one”] Dante, his eyes are “fissi e attenti” before the smile that he has been deprived of seeing since her death ten years before. For ten long years Dante’s eyes have so thirsted for the sight of Beatrice’s face that now, despite his purification in the Lethe, he is left senseless, caught by Beatrice’s smile in the same old net of pre-1290 courtly love days.³ Once more he is roused from his reverie, not by the reproachful Cato this time, but by the three Virtues with

From *Formulas of Repetition in Dante's Commedia: Signposted Journeys Across Textual Space*, pp. 131–53, 189–93. Copyright © 2001 by McGill-Queen's University Press.

the simple words “troppo fiso” [“too fixedly”] which open Dante’s senses to all the other wonders that surround him.

In the Empyrean, after Beatrice has taken her seat on high, she looks down on Dante and smiles at him one last time before turning her attention anew to the eternal fountain. Instead of following her gaze upward, Dante looks downward to the newly arrived Bernard of Clairvaux, the “fedele” of the Virgin Mary, and last guide to Dante. Bernard mildly reproaches Dante for looking down at him in curiosity instead of directing his eyes on high where the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Realm, presides smiling and beautiful. And Dante does as he is bidden, lifting his eyes to Mary. His eyes, now “fissi e attenti” on her, are followed by Bernard’s. Here there is no one to scold Dante. On the contrary, he gazes all the more ardently, as he beholds the depth of the faithful Bernard’s affection for his lady the Virgin Mary.

Only in these three instances in the *Commedia* does Dante adopt the formula “fissi e attenti.”⁴ Led by the signposts of the repeated formula “fissi e attenti,” the reader will come at last to the goal of the pilgrim’s journey: the Empyrean. Dante’s eyes, his “occhi miei,” modified in the latter two instances by “fissi e attenti,” reach the same destination, but by a longer route which begins in the *Vita Nuova* where his “occhi miei” first strayed from Beatrice in the direction of the Donna Gentile.

Ultimately the reader will be looking up, following Dante’s gaze towards the Virgin Mary on the highest level of the Empyrean. Alongside Dante, “fedele” of Beatrice (2.31.134) and Lucia (1.2.98), stands Bernard, “fedele” of the Virgin Mary, who has directed Dante’s gaze upward to where Mary is seated. At long last Dante’s “occhi miei” fix upon the Virgin Mary, bringing him back to the one who first recognized his plight in *Inferno* 2. There Mary commended Dante to Lucia, who in turn called on Beatrice to hear Dante’s piteous cry and observe his mortal struggle beneath the slope on the shore by: “la fiumana ove ’l mare non ha vanto” [“the flood over which the sea has no vaunt”] (1.2.108). Mary’s first words to Lucia identified Dante as a “fedele” who needed the help of her to whom he had been faithful: “Or ha bisogno il tuo fedele / di te, e io a te lo raccomando” [“Your faithful one has need of you now, and I commend him to you”] (1.2.98–9). Mary, seeing that Dante’s soul was at the point of death, turned to Lucia, thereby opening the way for the faithful Dante to journey upward to salvation, now almost attained.

From the vantage point of the Empyrean, destination of the signposted journey to the Empyrean, and ever mindful of Dante’s true goal, the enlightened reader can now look back to the place where the formula first emerges. There at the shore by another slope, Dante’s immortal soul is once more in peril. Like Virgil and the newly disembarked souls, he finds himself in an unfamiliar land, and is unsure how to behave. Ignorant, like his pagan guide,

of the new laws in effect in this Christian place, Dante nonetheless senses that the singing of amorous songs may be forbidden in Purgatory. What he requests of Casella, however, is slightly different:

E io: "Se nuova legge non ti toglie
memoria o uso a l'amoroso canto
che mi solea quetar tutte mie doglie,
di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto
l'anima mia, che, con la sua persona
venendo qui, è affannata tanto!"

[And I, "If a new law does not take from you memory or practice of the songs of love which used to quiet in me all my pains, may it please you therewith to comfort my soul somewhat, which coming hither with its body is so wearied."]

(2.2.106–11)

If Casella can still remember the words to love songs and is still able to sing them, Dante hopes he will be pleased to oblige his old friend. What is lacking in Dante's request is an appreciation that laws of the new realm now govern the conduct of penitent souls even though Casella or others may still possess the ability to transgress them.⁵ What is stressed by the pilgrim is his own soul's need of consolation. Casella obligingly sings a song from Dante's repertoire:

"Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona"
cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.
Lo mio maestro e io e quella gente
ch'eran con lui parevan sì contenti,
come a nessun toccasse altro la mente.

["*Love that discourses in my mind*," he then began so sweetly that the sweetness still within me sounds. My master and I and that folk who were with him appeared content as if naught else touched the mind of any.]

(2.2.112–17)

In verse 115 a shift occurs in the narrative. No longer is it just about Dante and his good friend Casella, but about the entire company of souls listening, contented and quieted by the sweetness of the song that the pilgrim asked

Casella to sing, even though the pilgrim did not request that Casella console anyone but himself. The reader now looking back at this episode from the vantage point of the Empyrean will be in a position to reconsider it with the benefit of hindsight and scrutinize more carefully its relevance to the difficulties of one particular pilgrim, Dante himself. Consequently, all the others included in the “tutti” which the formula modifies will be seen in the light of the pilgrim’s own errant behaviour and by extension the impact this has on them:

Noi eravam tutti *fissi e attenti*
 a le sue note; ed ecco il veglio onesto
 gridando: “Che è ciò, spiriti lenti?
 qual negligenza, quale stare è questo?
 Correte al monte a spogliarvi lo scoglio
 ch’esser non lascia a voi Dio manifesto.”

[We were all fixed and attentive to his notes, when lo, the venerable old man, crying, “What is this, you laggard spirits? What negligence, what stay is this? Haste to the mountain to strip off the slough that lets not God be manifest to you.”]

(2.2.118–23)

The choice of the “amoroso canto” sung by Casella was written by Dante probably for the Donna Gentile of the *Vita Nuova* to whom Dante turned after the death of Beatrice, and only later allegorized as Lady Philosophy in the *Convivio*, where the “canto” appears as the second *canzone*, opening book III.⁶ Dante was responsible both for its composition and now for its being sung by Casella to console his soul. This composition of Dante’s reflects his erstwhile fixed attention on the “other woman”: the Donna Gentile. The song’s effect on Dante and all the others in his company is negative in the extreme. It lures them to yield to temptation. The souls, fixed and attentive to its notes, delay their climb towards the mountain for their salvation. And the song that tempts is Dante’s old song.

Implicit in Dante the pilgrim’s request to Casella is that, for the duration of a song, he wishes to forget that he is at the foot of the mountain of Purgatory and imagine himself back in Florence so that his soul, having just completed a journey down to the depths of Hell, can be consoled.⁷ Dante desires ease from the pains that should keep him ever mindful of the truths the journey taught him about his past sinful life. These are the same truths which Casella’s singing used to make him forget back in Florence. That ten-year period from the death of Beatrice to Dante’s painful journey through

Hell was the time when he ceased to be the "fedele" of Beatrice, when his songs like the *canzone* for the Donna Gentile reflected his fallen state. And such songs were also having a contrary effect on those around him. Implicit in Dante the poet's reference to the fixed and attentive state of all who listen to the song so sweetly sung by Casella is the powerful lure of his poetry which draws its readers to linger fixed and attentive before the wrong kind of song, to love something which they should eschew. What we witness in the Casella episode is an example of that temptation. The poet's praise of the sweetness of his song also suggests that pride in his own poetry holds sway in his soul, reminiscent of Oderisi's former pride in his own accomplishments. Dante will encounter Oderisi, now penitent, on the first terrace of Purgatory proper. Unlike Oderisi, however, Dante does not yet appear to repent of his pride. If Dante still remembers with pleasure the sweetness of his song, then the pilgrim's prediction to Sapia that he will have to return to the terrace of the proud after his death has a further ring of truth to it.

What is it that Dante's songs lure his audience to love? As with all courtly love poetry these songs, now sung even more sweetly in the new style than before, tempt those who read or hear them into a desire for other men's wives. For a condemnation of such poetry one need look no farther than the seventh terrace of Purgatory where we find the father of the "sweet new style," Guido Guinizzelli, being purged of his sin in the burning flames which enclose the penitent lustful. Dante the pilgrim's request that Casella sing a love song prepares the reader for an idle moment when the pilgrim and his fellows turn their thoughts to beautiful courtly ladies. But Casella does not sing a simple "amoroso canto." His choice of *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* opens up the discourse by allowing for a very different interpretation.⁸ Is the Donna Gentile of the *canzone* the one Dante describes in chapters XXXV, XXXVI, and XXXVII of the *Vita Nuova*?⁹ Within the context of the *Vita Nuova* what is depicted is the piteous woman who became the object of Dante's attentions shortly after the death of Beatrice, a woman in whom Dante started to take too much delight, but no more than that. However, one cannot consider the question of the Donna Gentile without looking beyond the *Vita Nuova* to book II of the *Convivio*,¹⁰ where Dante explains that this same Donna Gentile is Lady Philosophy, and it is her praises that he sings in book III of the *Convivio* with the opening *canzone*, *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*. The Donna Gentile is no longer the woman of flesh and blood of the *Vita Nuova*, but has been allegorized to represent philosophy itself. The notes of this *canzone* sung so sweetly by Casella which once consoled only Dante after the death of Beatrice now console all who hear it, including Virgil, seduced by its siren call.

In Dante's journey to salvation he must learn to curb his pride in his own genius. But he begins badly in this new land, as the *canzone* in praise of Lady

Philosophy, written by himself, immobilizes all who hear it, “fissi e attenti” to its notes. Dante asks Casella if any new law prevents him from singing love songs, and appears unaware that by asking such a question he has already transgressed the limits of the realm. Juxtaposing Dante’s *canzone* with *In exitu Israel de Aegypto*, sung earlier aboard ship by these same pilgrim souls, Robert Hollander points to this episode as another example of Dante’s flawed responses: “He, lost in the beauty of his old song, either fails to understand or else forgets the message of the new song which he has heard first, and which should have served as a rein on his enthusiasm. It is as old as Exodus and as new as the dawn which brings it, this Easter Sunday morning at the shore of the mountain.”¹¹

In *Inferno* 26 Dante himself cautions that he must rein in his enthusiasm and curb his genius:

Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio
 quando drizzo la mente a ciò ch’io vidi,
 e più lo ‘ngegno affreno ch’i’ non soglio,
 perché non corra che virtù nol guidi;
 sì che, se stella bona o miglior cosa
 m’ha dato ’l ben, ch’io stessi nol m’invidi.

[I sorrowed then, and sorrow now again, when I turn my mind to what I saw; and I curb my genius more than I am wont, lest it run where virtue does not guide it; so that, if a kindly star or something better has granted me the good, I may not grudge myself that gift.]

(1.26.19–24)

The reason for these lines, as Dante enters the eighth *bolgia* of the fraudulent counsellors, appears enigmatic. But not for long. As Ulysses’ tale of his voyage beyond the Pillars of Hercules comes to a close at the end of the canto, the reader is left mindful of Dante’s earlier words. Dante the poet must curb his “ingegno” [“genius”] to ensure that, unlike Ulysses, he does not transgress the limits placed by God on human quest. The very presence of such cautionary words leads one to question whether Dante is aware that he has ever before overstepped those bounds. This surely occurred when he turned to Lady Philosophy in the guise of the Donna Gentile shortly after Beatrice’s death.¹²

The episode here under scrutiny on the shore beside the mountain of Purgatory lends further credence to this conjecture. At the end of *Purgatorio* 1, Virgil and Dante are sent by Cato to the shore where Dante is to be girded by the reed that grows there in preparation for the difficult climb ahead. And Virgil performs his task as pleased another (“com’ altrui piacque”):

Venimmo poi in sul lito deserto,
 che mai non vide navicar sue *acque*
 omo, che di tornar sia poscia esperto
 Quivi mi cinse sì *com' altrui piacque*:
 oh meraviglia! ché qual elli scelse
 l'umile pianta, cotal sì *rinacque*
 subitamente là onde l'avalse.

[Then we came to the desert shore, that never saw any man navigate its waters who afterwards had experience of return. There, even as pleased another, he girdled me. O marvel! That such as he plucked the humble plant, even such did it instantly spring up again, there whence he had uprooted it.]

(2.1.130–6)

Commentators have long noted that the formula “com' altrui piacque” also appears in *Inferno* 26, describing the conclusion of another voyage which took place in these same waters some 2500 years prior. Ulysses recounts the delight of all aboard his ship when after so long a time at sea in uncharted waters they spied the dark mountain off in the distance:

“Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto,
 ché de la nova terra un turbo *nacque*
 e percosse del legno il primo canto.
 Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l'*acque*;
 a la quarta levar la poppa in suso
 e la prora ire in giù, *com' altrui piacque*,
 infin che 'l mar fu sovra noi richiuso.”

[“We rejoiced, but soon our joy was turned to grief, for from the new land a whirlwind rose and struck the forepart of the ship. Three times it whirled her round with all the waters, and the fourth time it lifted the stern aloft and plunged the prow below, as pleased another, till the sea closed over us.”]

(1.26.136–42)

The “altrui” in *Inferno* 26 is God, who put an end to the voyage of the proud pagan who had transgressed His limits. In *Purgatorio* 1 the “altrui” refers to Cato, who may be seen as the extension of God's will. With the repetition of the formula, the reader is invited to juxtapose the doomed journey of Ulysses,

who was sent to the bottom by the will of God and never reached the shore, with the journey of Dante the pilgrim, who has seen those depths but whom God has allowed to resurface and proceed safely to that same shore.

Along with the repetition of the rhyme words “acque” and “nacque,” now “rinacque” also beckons the attention of the reader. In both cases the “acque” refer to those same waters that surround Purgatory. Indeed in *Purgatorio* 1.130–2, quoted above, there is implicit reference to the failed voyage of Ulysses as one who navigated those waters but did not survive them. Ironically it was the new waters in *Inferno* 26 which rose up and overwhelmed Ulysses and his men. And the storm which churned those waters was born (“nacque”) from what for Ulysses was a new land: Purgatory. In *Purgatorio* 1, “nacque” becomes “rinacque,” reflecting the theme of rebirth implicit in Purgatory. The rush that grows along those waters is reborn after Virgil picks it, reflecting this rebirth that awaits the penitent souls who, unlike Ulysses, manage to disembark at Purgatory’s shore. The repetition of the formula “com’ altrui piacque” along with its rhyme words invites a juxtaposition between the result of Ulysses’ hubris and the rebirth of Dante the pilgrim now girded with the humble plant by his guide, in both cases “as pleased another.”

But *Purgatorio* 2 tells a different story. Do not be misled into thinking at the end of *Purgatorio* 1 that Dante will learn from Ulysses’ failed attempt and curb his pride in his own genius. For Dante now girded by the humble plant does not immediately depart from this barren shore. He delays his journey to salvation. He also delays the journey of Casella by asking him to sing an “amoroso canto.” Then too he hinders the other newly disembarked souls as they listen transfixed to Casella’s song. Like Ulysses’ crew, who are urged on to their doom by Ulysses’ eloquent words in *Inferno* 26.112–20, the penitent souls are also in thrall to the eloquent words of another. And like Ulysses and his crew, Dante and his fellow pilgrims break the law of this new land. They are fixed and attentive to the seductive words of Lady Philosophy. But unlike Ulysses and his crew, the penitent souls are roused from their reverie by Cato, inevitably “as pleased another,” and unlike Ulysses and his crew they are allowed to advance to the mountain.

We must remember that Dante’s “ingegno,” so prudently restrained at the start of *Inferno* 26, was the source of the eloquent words in praise of Lady Philosophy, so sweetly sung by Casella. These words almost made Dante succumb to temptation, together with the other recently disembarked penitent souls, reflecting the lost state of Dante’s soul and his impact on others during the ten-year period leading up to this journey to salvation in 1300.

Despite such incidents of backsliding, Dante is moving back towards Beatrice, something that Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti does not understand

in *Inferno* 10 when reference is first made to Dante's "ingegno" within a philosophical context. Cavalcante wrongly assumes that if Dante can journey through Hell by dint of his genius ("per altezza d'ingegno" 1.10.59) then his son Guido should be at Dante's side. Dante responds by indicating Virgil as his guide perhaps to the one Guido disdained, namely Beatrice:¹³

E io a lui: "Da me stesso non vegno:
colui ch'attende là, per qui mi mena
forse cui Guido vostro ebbe a disdegno."

[And I to him, "I come not of myself. He who waits yonder, leads me through here to the one whom perhaps your Guido had in disdain."]

(1.10.61–3)

Dante's return to Beatrice is contrasted with Guido Cavalcanti's rejection of what she represents. Like Dante, Guido could have left his "Donna Gentile," his Lady Philosophy, and been guided by another to his salvation.¹⁴ But Cavalcante knows his son well and realizes that Guido travels through life "per altezza d'ingegno." Like Ulysses, Guido is not one to follow in anyone else's wake. Guido's transgression of the rules, his philosophical exploration beyond his own Pillars of Hercules, will very probably bring him to this sixth circle of the heretics, right alongside his father, Cavalcante, and his father-in-law, Farinata. Unlike Ulysses and Guido Cavalcanti, Dante has broken no such laws. He does not explore the nether reaches of the damned at his own behest. He does not appear in danger of shipwreck, but the siren song of pride in his own genius must be resisted, as he makes clear in *Inferno* 26, lest it temporarily lead him off his course, as happens in *Purgatorio* 2.

In *Purgatorio* 19 Dante is once more spared the fate of Ulysses, but only after almost succumbing and following that negative example. He dreams of the Femmina Balba, who before his eyes is transformed into the sweet siren.¹⁵ As occurred earlier in the Casella episode, once the siren begins to sing Dante is so transfixed that it would be difficult for him to turn away from her:

Poi ch'ell' avea 'l parlar così disciolto,
cominciava a cantar sì, che con pena
da lei avrei mio intento rivolto.
"Io son," cantava, "io son dolce serena,
che' marinari in mezzo mar dismago;
tanto son di piacere a sentir piena!"

[When she had her speech thus unloosed, she began to sing so that it would have been hard for me to turn my attention from her. "I am," she sang, "I am the sweet Siren who leads mariners astray in mid-sea, so full am I of pleasantness to hear."]

(2.19.16–21)

The Femmina Balba sings her own praises, and for a brief time the slumbering Dante is under her spell. In a dream she almost lures Dante away from his appointed course, much as Casella's "amoroso canto" of the "Donna Gentile," allegorized as Lady Philosophy, enticed him at the shore of the mountain, and much as the "Donna Gentile" literally enticed him after the death of Beatrice.¹⁶ The Femmina Balba did in fact succeed in tempting Ulysses from his course at sea, or so she claims:¹⁷

"Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago
al canto mio; e qual meco s'ausa,
rado sen parte; sì tutto l'appago!"

["Ulysses, eager to journey on, I turned aside to my song; and whosoever abides with me rarely departs, so wholly do I satisfy him."]

(2.19.22–4)

Ulysses, who will transgress the limits imposed on humankind and follow the siren call of knowledge to his doom near the shore of the mountain, here reveals his all too human vulnerability to the song of the seductive siren.

Before encountering Ulysses in *Inferno* 26 Dante has already conveyed to the reader that his genius must not run where virtue does not guide: "e più to 'ngegno affreno ch'i' non soglio, / perché non corra che virtù nol guidi" ["and I curb my genius more than I am wont, lest it run where virtue does not guide it"] (1.26.21–2). In *Purgatorio* 2 and again in *Purgatorio* 19 the transfigured pilgrim temporarily turns away from virtue's guidance until in the former instance Cato arrives on the scene, and in the latter a lady ("santa e presta" ["holy and alert"] V. 26), possibly Beatrice herself (see chapter 4)¹⁸ urges Virgil to shake Dante from his slumber while the Femmina Balba is still in mid-song. On both occasions Ulysses' negative example looms large just off stage.

In *Purgatorio* 31 Beatrice forces Dante to acknowledge all the impediments and the allurements encountered on his journey back to her by reminding him of the ditches across his path ("fossi attraversati" V. 25), the spurious attractions and advantages ("agevolezze . . . anzi" V. 28) of worldly delights,

the sirens ("le serene" V. 45) he must valiantly resist, and the damsels or other fleeting trifles ("pargoletta / o altra novità con sì breve uso" VV. 59–60) which must not hinder him. These references recall Dante's weakness and backsliding during the 1290 to 1300 period after Beatrice's death when he was enticed off course by the call of the Donna Gentile, allegorized in the *Convivio* as the call of Lady Philosophy. The reference to the sirens reminds the reader specifically of the Femmina Balba, who tempted Ulysses off his course and was poised to lure Dante as well. But unlike Ulysses, Dante has managed to get back on course and journey home to his lady, and he confesses his fault:

... "Le presenti cose
col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,
tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose."

[... "The present things, with their false pleasure, turned my steps
aside, as soon as your countenance was hidden."] (2.31.34–6)

Dante was tempted off course soon after Beatrice's death and turned, as he says in the *Convivio* II xii, to Lady Philosophy. And she was the subject of Dante's *canzone*, which opens book III: *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*, so sweetly sung by Casella that Dante and all his company closed their minds to all else, fixed and attentive until scolded by Cato for their negligence in pursuing their appointed course from the shore of Purgatory to the mountain. Dante might have remained off course, like Ulysses never to reach his true goal, but Cato arrived and scolded as pleased God. Dante has now scaled the height of that mountain, and here acknowledges that all the other things which once held him in thrall are now hateful to him: "tutte altre cose qual mi torse / più nel suo amor, più mi si fé nemica" ["all other things, that which had most turned me to love of it became most hateful to me"] (2.31.86–7). Were Dante not willing to look beyond his own human capacity and seek guidance from others, he would have succumbed to the spell of the sirens, and like Ulysses would have been shipwrecked long before this.

After fainting from remorse Dante regains his senses in the waters of the Lethe where Matelda has drawn him. Approaching the far shore he hears a song quite unlike *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* sung at that other shore now far behind him:

Quando fui presso a la beata riva,
"Asperges me" sì dolcemente udissi,
che nol so rimembrar, non ch'io lo scriva.

[When I was close to the blessed shore, I heard "*Asperges me*" sung so sweetly that I cannot remember it, far less write it.]
(2.31.97–9)

The songs are so different and yet the tercets that contain them bear some striking similarities. Let us compare the two:

"Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona"
cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.

["*Love that discourses in my mind,*" he then began so sweetly that the sweetness still within me sounds.]
(2.2.112–14)

The formula "*sì dolcemente*" is repeated in both instances and appears nowhere else in the *Commedia*. As well, in both instances what immediately follows is reference to the current state of the poet either remembering or not the words of the songs. While the sweetness of *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* still resounds in Dante's memory, the sweetness of *Asperges me* is on a higher plane, too much for human faculties to retain. The sweetness with which the song was sung has erased the very words themselves from Dante's memory, so much so that even now he finds himself unable to transcribe these famous verses from Psalm 50: "*Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor*" ["Cleanse me of sin with hyssop, that I may be purified; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow"] (50:9). Dante's sins are being washed away as *Asperges me* is being sung, the same sins which had held such attraction for him as he listened to *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*. *Asperges me* was sung so sweetly that its words were likewise wiped from Dante's memory. The formula "*sì dolcemente*" is used to describe both songs, yet the impact from *Asperges me* is far greater. *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* may be an enticing tune for humans to remember, but it is fleeting compared with the *Asperges me* sung by the angels. As we see in *Paradiso* 33, what a mere mortal like Dante the pilgrim cannot remember and cannot transcribe is far nobler than what he can.

Once Dante attains the far shore of the Lethe, he should be well beyond the reach of temptation and able to recognize how much sweeter the song is that comes down from on high than any "*amoroso canto*" produced by mortal man (Dante himself). Dante is now at Beatrice's side and the three theological Virtues sing their song to Beatrice:

“Volgi, Beatrice, volgi li occhi santi,”
era la sua canzone, “al tuo fedele
che, per vederti, ha mossi passi tanti!”

[“Turn, Beatrice, turn your holy eyes upon your faithful one,” was
their song, “who has moved so many steps to see you.”]
(2.31.133–5)

The Virtues sing a “canzone” to Dante’s true lady of the *Vita Nuova* in which they beseech her to cast her saintly eyes in the direction of her faithful one who has come such a long way to be by her side. Such a *canzone* is in marked contrast to the “amoroso canto” in praise of Lady Philosophy that Casella had sung and which had detained Dante and the company of souls on the shore of Purgatory. Dante is now Beatrice’s “fedele,” not just as one of the “fedeli d’Amore” (*Vita Nuova* III), but as one who has ultimately proven himself faithful to her through all his trials, despite the ditches, the attractions, the sirens, and the “amorosi canti” that had appeared as roadblocks in his way back to her.¹⁹

In response to the song of the three theological Virtues, “Volgi Beatrice, volgi li occhi santi,” Beatrice turns to Dante and unveils her smiling face. *Purgatorio* 32 opens with the focus on Dante’s own eyes, now “fissi e attenti,” which have not looked upon Beatrice in ten years:

Tant’eran li occhi miei *fissi e attenti*
a disbramarsi la decenne sete,
che li altri sensi m’eran tutti spenti.

[So fixed and intent were my eyes in satisfying their ten-year thirst,
that every other sense was quenched in me.]
(2.32.1–3)

The formula of repetition “fissi e attenti” now describes Dante’s eyes, which are making up for some ten years of being deprived of sight of the one alone who could have quenched that thirst.²⁰

The saga of Dante’s eyes, now again turned to Beatrice here in Earthly Paradise, began in the *Vita Nuova* one year after her death. At the opening of chapter XXXV, Dante was filled with sorrowful thoughts as his mind turned to times past. He raised his eyes to see whether others were witness to his grief:²¹

Poi per alquanto tempo, con ciò fosse cosa che io fosse in parte ne
la quale mi ricordava del passato tempo molto stava pensoso, e con

dolorosi pensamenti, tanto che mi faceano parere de fore una vista di terribile sbigottimento. Onde io, accorgendomi del mio travagliare, *levai li occhi* per vedere se altri mi vedesse. Allora vidi una gentile donna giovane e bella molto, la quale da una finestra mi riguardava sì pietosamente, quanto a la vista, che tutta la pietà pareva in lei accolta.

[Afterwards, for some time, because I was in a place where I remembered days gone by, I became very pensive and filled with such sorrowful thoughts that I took on an appearance of terrible distress. Becoming aware of my condition, I raised my eyes to see if anyone noticed it; and then I saw a gracious lady, young and very beautiful, who was looking at me from a window so compassionately, as it seemed from her appearance, that all pity seemed to be gathered in her.]

(*VN XXXV*)

Dante's eyes met those of the Donna Gentile, in whom he sensed the most noble kind of love. He addressed his first sonnet to her and described how his eyes saw in her a kindred spirit:

Videro *li occhi miei* quanta pietate
era apparita in la vostra figura,
quando guardaste li atti e la statura
ch'io faccio per dolor molte fiate.

[These eyes of mine beheld the tenderness which marked your features when you turned to gaze upon my doleful bearing and the ways I many times assume in my distress.]

(*Videro li occhi miei*, VV.1–4)

In chapter XXXVI, we are told that the Donna Gentile reminds Dante of Beatrice, who enables the tears of grief to flow from his eyes:

E certo molte volte non potendo lagrimare né disfogare la mia tristizia, io andava per vedere questa pietosa donna, la quale pareva che tirasse le lagrime fuori de *li miei occhi* per la sua vista.

[Often indeed when I could not weep or give expression to my sorrow I used to go to see this compassionate being, the very sight of whom seemed to draw the tears from my eyes.]

(*VN XXXVI*)

In chapter XXXVII, Dante's eyes begin to delight too much in the Donna Gentile:

Io venni a tanto per la vista di questa donna, che *li miei occhi* si cominciarono a dilettere troppo di vederla . . .

[The sight of this lady had such an effect on me that my eyes began to delight too much in seeing her . . .]
(*VN* XXXVII)

He becomes angry with himself and curses his eyes: "Onde più volte bestemiava la vanitate de *li occhi miei* . . ." ["And often too I cursed the vanity of my eyes . . ."]. His thoughts address his eyes and point out their error in turning away from the one for whom they used to weep. Now they should weep in guilt for having abandoned Beatrice. At the close of this address, Dante is full of anguish: "E quando così avea detto fra me medesimo a *li miei occhi*, e li sospiri m'assalivano grandissimi e angosciosi" ["When I had spoken within myself to my eyes in this way, I was beset with deep sighs of anguish"]. Dante tells how in his sonnet which follows he will speak to his eyes: "E dissi questo sonetto, lo quale comincia: *L'amaro lagrimar*. Ed hae due parti: ne la prima parlo a *li occhi miei* . . ." ["And so I wrote the sonnet beginning: *The bitter tears*. It has two parts. In the first I speak to my eyes . . ."]. The sonnet invokes Dante's eyes ("oi occhi miei" *V*. 2), which once wept for Beatrice. They have forsaken her for the Donna Gentile and now must turn away from the "viso d'una donna che vi mira" ["the face of a lady who holds you"] (*V*. 11). Dante's heart reminds his eyes never again to forget and turn from Beatrice:

"Voi non dovrete mai se non per morte,
la vostra donna, ch'è morta, obliare."
Così dice 'l meo core, e poi sospira.

["While life endures you should not ever be inconstant to your lady who is dead." So speaks my heart, I hear, and then it sighs.]
(*L'amaro lagrimar*, *VV*. 12–14)

In *Purgatorio* 32, the reappearance of Beatrice before Dante's "occhi miei," now "fissi e attenti," raises the question of whom they were "fissi e attenti" upon during the ten long years he thirsted for a sight of her. Part of the answer comes in *Purgatorio* 2 when Dante is fixed and attentive to the song *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* in praise of Lady Philosophy, Dante who wrote such "amorosi

canti" in her honour. And the circumstances at the shore of Purgatory can only be understood if one looks back at chapters XXXV, XXXVI, and XXXVII of the *Vita Nuova*, which explain those earlier circumstances that first caused Dante to wander in the direction of the Donna Gentile.

The retrospective journey signposted by the formula "fissi e attenti" takes the reader from *Purgatorio* 32 back to *Purgatorio* 2 and likewise to those same circumstances, but now from the perspective of Dante's "occhi miei," which have replaced "tutti" as the subject modified by "fissi e attenti." The first tercet of *Purgatorio* 32 announces the return of Dante's wandering eyes to the true goal. Or does it? Let us look at the tercet in relation to the one that follows:

Tant'eran li occhi miei *fissi e attenti*
 a disbramarsi la decenne sete,
 che li altri sensi m'eran tutti spenti.
 Ed essi quinci e quindi avien parete
 di non caler—così lo santo riso
 sé traéli con l'antica rete! . . .

[So fixed and intent were my eyes in satisfying their ten-year thirst,
 that every other sense was quenched in me; and they themselves
 had a wall of indifference, on one side and on the other, so did the
 holy smile draw them to itself with the old net . . .]
 (2.32.1–6)

All of Dante's other senses fail him, stilled just as when he could think of nothing but the sweetness of Casella's song to the Donna Gentile, so contented "come a nessun tocasse altro la mente" ["as if naught else touched the mind of any"] (2.2.117). In that episode in *Purgatorio* 2 Dante was fixed and attentive to the song from the old times and was transported back to the irresponsible days of his youth when he looked at the Donna Gentile, his mind closed to all else. Now in *Purgatorio* 32 he is fixed and attentive before the unveiled Beatrice and again he is transported back to those days, his eyes once more ensnared, unable to see anything but the beautiful unveiled face of Beatrice. The siren call of feminine beauty has sounded once again, and as before Dante is helpless, his eyes unable to escape the old net, until the three Virtues intervene and warn Dante that his eyes have been looking upon his beloved too fixedly:

. . . quando per forma mi fu vòlto il viso
 ver' la sinistra mia da quelle dee,
 perch' io udi' da loro un "Troppo fiso!"

[... when my face was turned perforce to my left by those goddesses, for I heard from them a "Too fixedly!"]
(2.32.7-9)

It seems curious that Dante's eyes, once more looking upon Beatrice with too much ardour, were similarly described in the episode of the *Vita Nuova* when they began to delight too much in seeing the Donna Gentile after Beatrice's death. Again I quote:

Io venni a tanto per la vista di questa donna, che *li miei occhi*
si cominciarono a dilettere troppo di vederla ...

[The sight of this lady had such an effect on me that my eyes began to delight too much in seeing her ...]
(VN XXXVII)

In chapter XXXIX Dante's eyes are rescued from the Donna Gentile by a vision of Beatrice in glory:

... mi parve questa gloriosa Beatrice con quelle vestimenta sanguigne co le quali apparve prima a *li occhi miei*; e pareami giovane in simile etade in quale io prima la vidi.

[... I seemed to see Beatrice in glory, clothed in the crimson garments in which she first appeared before my eyes; and she seemed as young as when I first saw her.]
(VN XXXIX)

Dante expresses the shame he feels for his wandering eyes by announcing the sonnet which will close the chapter:

E dissi allora: *Lasso! Per forza di molti sospiri*; e dissi "lasso" in quanto mi vergognava di ciò, che *li miei occhi* aveano così vaneggiato.

[So then I wrote: *Alas! By the violence of many sighs*. I said "alas" because I was ashamed that my eyes had indulged in such inconstancy.]
(VN XXXIX)

The return of Dante's eyes to the youthful image of "questa gloriosa Beatrice" in the *Vita Nuova* is echoed by their return to her in *Purgatorio* 32, yet

the return cannot be based on past memories. That caused all the trouble in *Purgatorio* 2. However, the reproach of the three Virtues is less severe than that of Cato. The image of a youthful Beatrice in glory rescued Dante's eyes from the trap of temptation in the *Vita Nuova* XXXIX, but Beatrice in glory in *Purgatorio* 32 is no longer that young lady of his youth. Thus Dante is forced to withdraw his eyes from the "antica rete" of surface feminine beauty and take in the magnificent whole:

Ma poi ch'al poco il viso riformossi
(e dico "al poco" per rispetto al molto
sensibile onde a forza mi rimossi),
vidi 'n sul braccio destro esser rivolto
lo glorioso esercito . . .

[But after my sight had adjusted itself to the lesser object—lesser, I mean, with regard to the greater from which I was forced to withdraw—I saw that glorious army had wheeled on its right . . .]
(2.32.13–17)

The final repetition of the formula in *Paradiso* 31 occurs just after Dante has paid homage to Beatrice, who has guided him beyond temptation to liberty and is now in her rightful seat in the Empyrean. Dante is now with another "fedele," Bernard, his final guide and "fedele" of the Virgin Mary:

"E la regina del cielo, ond'io ardo
tutto d'amor, ne farà ogni grazia,
però ch'i' sono il suo fedel Bernardo."

["And the Queen of Heaven, for whom I am all afire with love, will grant us every grace, since I am her faithful Bernard."]
(331.100–2)

It is now only the Virgin Mary who can intervene on Dante's behalf and grant every grace. The Virgin Mary has already interceded once before. In *Inferno* 2 we learn that it was the Virgin Mary who first noted Dante's plight in the dark wood. Adopting the term "fedele," she commended the beaten Dante to Lucia as Lucia's "fedele": "Or ha bisogno il tuo fedele / di te, e io a te lo raccomando" ["Your faithful one has need of you now, and I commend him to you"] (1.2.98–9).

However, for the moment Dante appears more interested in the "sene," Bernard, than in looking up and beholding the vast array of souls in their

blessed state and ultimately the Virgin Mary on high ready to consider the request of her “fedel Bernardo.” With the mildest reproach Bernard directs Dante’s eyes away from himself:

“Figliuol di grazia, quest’esser giocondo,”
cominciò elli, “non ti sarà noto,
tenendo li occhi pur qua giù al fondo . . .”

[“Son of grace, this joyous being,” he began, “will not be known to you if you hold your eyes only down here at the base . . .”]
(3-31.112-14)

Dante has been concentrating on Bernard and is taken to task for it. In each of the three episodes highlighted by the formula “fissi e attenti” Dante is reprimanded, but in each succeeding episode the reprimand becomes milder: from Cato’s harsh words when Dante is lulled by the siren call of Lady Philosophy, to the three theological Virtues’ concern that Dante is too taken with feminine beauty, to Bernard redirecting Dante’s curious eyes from himself to the Virgin Mary on high.

And Dante immediately does as he is bidden and follows Bernard’s gaze:

Io *levai li occhi*; e come da mattina
la parte orientale de l’orizzonte
soverchia quella dove ’l sol declina,
così, quasi di valle andando a monte
con li occhi, vidi parte ne lo stremo
vincer di lume tutta l’altra fronte.

[I lifted up my eyes; and as at morning the eastern parts of the horizon outshine that where the sun declines, so, as if going with my eyes from valley to mountain-top I saw a part on the extreme verge surpass with its light all the rest of the rim.]
(3.31.118-23)

Dante lifted his eyes once before to take in new sights after Beatrice had left him. In the *Vita Nuova*, Dante, full of sorrow, looked about to see whether anyone had noticed his distressing appearance:

Onde io, accorgendomi del mio travagliare, *levai li occhi* per vedere se altri mi vedesse. Allora vidi una gentile donna giovane e bella molto . . .

[Becoming aware of my condition, I raised my eyes to see if anyone noticed me; and then I saw a gracious lady, young and very beautiful . . .]

(*VN XXXV*)

If the earlier appearance of the formula “*levai li occhi*” announced the departure of Dante’s eyes, straying from the correct path in the valley of temptation and sin, its repetition here in the Empyrean highlights that he has learned to resist all temptation and turn his eyes upward to the highest summit where reigns the true Lady, Queen of the Realm.

As Dante the pilgrim lifts his eyes towards the summit, a final reference is made to Phaeton’s misguided flight at the reins of the Chariot of the Sun, a reference which has appeared on four previous occasions in the *Commedia* and always signifies the incorrect journey which can befall us if we seek human quest and reject guidance as pleases God.²² The reference to Phaeton and his fall is a reminder of what awaits those who take a wrong turn in their life journey, like Ulysses, who listened to the siren call and was sent down to the bottom “as pleased another.” At the foot of the mountain of Purgatory Dante was lulled by the siren call of an all too worldly song, but was rescued by the reproachful Cato and sent on to commence his climb, “as pleased another.” Here in the Empyrean, as Dante’s eyes travel upward from valley to summit just as he himself has done, he sees angels singing songs in celebration of the Virgin Mary. These are the right songs, sung at the summit as pleases God.

And so, as they inevitably must, his eyes reach the culmination of their journey up the Celestial Rose:

Bernardo, come vide li occhi miei
nel caldo suo caler *fissi e attenti*,
li suoi con tanto affetto volse a lei,
che’ miei di rimirar fé più ardenti.

[Bernard, when he saw my eyes fixed and intent on the object of his own burning glow, turned his own with such affection to her, that he made mine more ardent in their gazing.]

(3.31.139–42)

With the final repetition of the formula “*fissi e attenti*,” Dante’s eyes have reached the peak, the destination of their ascent. His eyes, which had looked upon Beatrice too “*fissi e attenti*” on top of that other summit, the mountain of Purgatory, now look “*fissi e attenti*” upon Mary at the final summit. Here Dante is not scolded for being one of those “*fissi e attenti*” to the unsuitable

song as he was in *Purgatorio* 2. Here Dante is not scolded for his “occhi miei” being too “fissi e attenti” on feminine beauty as he was in *Purgatorio* 32. Here Dante’s “occhi miei,” “fissi e attenti,” are joined by Bernard’s own, making Dante’s even more ardent in their admiration of the Virgin Mary.

The signposted journey through Purgatory has highlighted the detours Dante’s life has taken over the years: from his love for feminine beauty, to his love for Lady Philosophy after Beatrice’s death, both contributing to his fall into the dark wood in 1300, from which he cannot emerge until the Virgin Mary intervenes on his behalf. The Virgin Mary, the one, according to Bernard, who can help Dante, “quella the puote aiutarti” (3.32.148), is the destination of the signposted journey, she who first took steps to save him from a Phaeton-like demise, she who initiated his overt journey back to herself.

Lastly, in *Paradiso* 33 the Virgin Mary’s pivotal role is described by her “fedele” Bernard in his prayer of devotion to her. And Bernard’s first reference to Dante in his prayer to the Virgin Mary encapsulates in two tercets what Dante has seen in his journey from the depths of Hell to this high place:

“Or questi, che da l’infima lacuna
de l’universo infin qui ha vedute
le vite spiritali ad una ad una,
supplica a te, per grazia, di virtute
tanto, che possa con *li occhi levarsi*
più alto verso l’ultima salute.”

[“Now this man, who from the lowest pit of the universe even to here has seen one by one the spiritual lives, implores thee of thy grace for power such that he may be able with his eyes to rise still higher toward the last salvation.”]

(3.33.22–7)

Bernard requests of the Virgin Mary that Dante’s eyes may be raised to God, the ultimate salvation. His words “li occhi levarsi” recall how far Dante has come since he first raised his eyes to the Donna Gentile so long ago (“levai li occhi per vedere se altri mi vedesse” [“I raised my eyes to see if anyone noticed me”] *VN XXXV*).

The first words to follow Bernard’s prayer describe Mary’s eyes, “fixed” on Bernard:

Li occhi da Dio dilette e venerati,
fissi ne l’orator, ne dimostraro
quanto i devoti prieghi le son grati . . .

[The eyes beloved and revered by God, fixed upon him who
prayed, showed us how greatly devout prayers do please her . . .]
(3.33.40–2)

Mary looks momentarily at her “fedele” (Bernard), just as Beatrice in *Paradiso* 31.91–3 had looked at her “fedele” (Dante), before returning her gaze to God.

Dante is now attempting to fathom the “luce eterna” (3.33.83). “la forma universal di questo nodo” [“the universal form of this knot”] (3.33.91):

Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa,
mirava fissa, immobile e attenta,
e sempre di mirar faceasi accesa.

[Thus my mind, all rapt, was gazing, fixed, motionless and intent,
ever enkindled by its gazing.]
(3.33.97–9)

In this final instance where a form of the adjectives “fisso” and “attento” appear in the text, they modify not Dante’s eyes this time, but his mind fixed and attentive to the “forma universal” (V. 91), which Dante the poet thinks he saw.²³ Dante now stands before the ultimate goal of the overt journey, the goal beyond the last repetition of the formula, yet still linked to it. Here the subject of “fisso” and “attento” is not Dante along with other souls, as was the case in *Purgatorio* 2, nor is the subject Dante’s eyes alone, as it was in both *Purgatorio* 32 and *Paradiso* 31. In this final canto of the *Commedia* Dante’s sight and mind both merge. As Porena says in his commentary, “i tre aggettivi, pur riferendosi grammaticalmente alla parola *mente*, nella sostanza dipingono tutto Dante: fisso con gli occhi, immobile col corpo, attento con la mente” [“the three adjectives, although referring grammatically to the word *mente*, in substance . . . depict the entire being of Dante: fixed with his eyes, immobile with his body, intent with his mind”].²⁴ Indeed this description of Dante recalls the formula, the signposts, along the way: Dante “immobile col corpo” [“immobile with his body”] together with the other souls in *Purgatorio* 2, Dante “fisso con gli occhi” [“fixed with his eyes”] in *Purgatorio* 32 and *Paradiso* 31. And here, in *Paradiso* 33, Dante is “attento con la mente” [“intent with his mind”] as he fixes his entire being (“tutto Dante”) on the Eternal Light.

The poet now stresses that there is no turning away from a fixed and attentive gaze upon the Eternal Light:

A quella luce cotal si diventa,
che volgersi da lei per altro aspetto
è impossibil che mai si consenta . . .

[In that light one becomes such that it is impossible he should ever
consent to turn himself from it for other sight . . .]
(3.33.100–2)

The fourth and final appearance of the adjectives “fisso” and “attento,” taken together with the first of the three “fissi e attenti,” highlights the journey to salvation available to all, including those once transfixed by the siren call of Lady Philosophy. Now that Dante’s “mente” is turned “fissa, immobile e attenta,” to “quella luce,” however, his “doglie,” referred to back in *Purgatorio* 2 with the first appearance of the formula, can truly be relieved. Dante’s “occhi miei,” repeated for the last time in *Paradiso* 33 (V. 129), have journeyed from the valley of the Donna Gentile to the lofty heights of the Empyrean where they are now fixed on the Trinity, and here it is impossible for the pilgrim who has reached this final goal to fix his gaze upon any lesser being.

NOTES

1. In the Petrocchi text the noun in the rhyme position of verse 108 appears as “doglie.” In the past the noun has appeared as “voglie,” and Singleton more recently still argued for “voglie” over “doglie.” While the replacement of “voglie” with “doglie” in the text obviously changes the meaning, whether it be Dante’s “desires” or “pains” that require soothing, the fact remains that Dante the pilgrim, newly come from the depths of Hell, is hoping for some distraction after the rigours of his infernal journey.

2. See Bosco-Reggio, *Purgatorio* 39, who endorse the view held by most modern scholars that *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* was a *canzone* originally written by Dante most likely for the “Donna Gentile” of the *Vita Nuova* and only later allegorized and placed at the beginning of book III of the *Convivio*. If the *canzone* was originally sung by Casella as an “amoroso canto” then the problems raised by the Anonimo Fiorentino that *canzoni* with a moral or doctrinal message were not put to music would evaporate. Casella could not know that the *Convivio* confirms (see also I.i.16) that the “Donna Gentile” is Lady Philosophy: “. . . la filosofia, che era donna di questi autori, di queste scienze e di questi libri, fosse somma cosa. E imaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile, e non la poteva imaginare in atto alcuno se non misericordioso . . .” [“. . . philosophy, who was the lady of these authors, these disciplines and these books, was something of supreme importance. I imagined it as having the form of a noble lady, and I could not imagine her with a bearing other than full of pity . . .”] (*Convivio* II xii 6–7).

3. “Antica” (*Purg.* 32.6) as an adjective modifies “rete,” appears twice two cantos earlier in *Purgatorio* 30, in verse 39 where it modifies “amor” (“d’antico amor”) and in verse 48 where as an adjective it modifies “fiamma” (“antica fiamma”). All

three references to “antico” refer to early days in the *Vita Nuova* when as a boy Dante first laid eyes on Beatrice.

4. As previously mentioned in the Introduction, n. 19, Storey, “Canto XXXI” 470, has noted the repetition of the formula “fissi e attenti.”

5. Robert Hollander, “Canto II” 28, looks at the context of the reunion between Dante and Casella, who both behave as if they were still living in their lives of the past, not their “hoped-for future life.” With this in mind, the question Dante poses to Casella regarding whether any new law removes from Casella his ability to practise his old profession is proof of the degree to which Dante is “deflected from his ordained purpose.” Dante should recall Cato’s words from the previous canto that there is a new law, the law which was decreed with Christ’s Harrowing of Hell, that removes those in Purgatory from their emotional attachments in the past, in Cato’s case his past life with his wife Marcia still in Limbo: “Or che di là dal mal fiume dimora, / più muover non mi può, per quella legge / che fatta fu quando me n’usci’ fora” [“Now that she dwells beyond the evil stream no more may she move me, by the law which was made when I came forth from there”] (2.1.88–90).

6. In John Freccero, “Casella’s Song,” the long-held view of most critics that the song Casella sings is merely a love song is challenged. Freccero argues convincingly that Casella’s song must be seen with “its full philosophical force” (74), despite the implication of the Anonimo Fiorentino that if doctrinal songs were never sung *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* can be nothing more than a simple love song. He builds his case by showing the parallels between Dante’s Donna Gentile in the *Convivio* and Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation* of Boethius and points out that Casella sings of a lady, the Donna Gentile who can offer a similar consolation which has nothing to do with erotic love. In Robert Hollander, “Purgatorio II: Cato’s Rebuke and Dante’s *scoglio*” (repr. in his *Studies in Dante* 91–105), the conventional critical view is similarly challenged. Hollander establishes that Casella’s singing of the second ode of the *Convivio*, in contravention of the New Law, is harmful in the extreme by tempting those who stop and listen much as the Golden Calf tempted the Israelites. The only other reference in the *Commedia* to an ode from the *Convivio* is similarly negative. It appears in *Paradiso* 8.34–9, where the example of *Voi ch’ntendendo il terzo ciel movete* [You who move the third heaven by intellection] is raised to convey the error in Dante’s thinking when he composed it.

7. Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante Poet of the Desert* 54, refers to this space for the moment of the song, not as the shore of Purgatory, but “as a fictive space of gathering.”

8. In Freccero, “Casella’s Song” 74, the “Amore” of feminine beauty in Francesca’s tercets is contrasted with the “Amore” of Lady Philosophy in Casella’s *canzone*, marking Dante’s way into a new realm of interest.

9. See Scott, “Beatrice’s Reproaches in Eden” 4–5, who suggests that the temptations in Dante’s life to which Beatrice refers in *Purgatorio* 31 may bring to mind the “Donna Gentile” episode of chapters XXXV, XXXVI, and XXXVII of the *Vita Nuova*.

10. “E imaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile, e non la poteva imaginare in atto alcuno se non misericordioso . . . E da questo imaginare cominciai ad andare là dov’ella si dimostrava veracemente, cioè ne le scuole de là religiosi e a le disputazioni de li filosofanti. Si che in picciol tempo, forse di trenta mesi, cominciai tanto a sentire de la sua dolcezza, che lo suo amore cacciava e distruggeva ogni altro pensiero”

["I imagined it as having the form of a noble lady, and I could not imagine her with a bearing other than full of pity . . . Drawn by this image, I began to go to where she truly revealed herself, that is, to the schools of the religious and the disputations of the philosophers. And so in a short time, perhaps some thirty months, I began to experience so profoundly the sweetness she brings that love of her drove out and destroyed all thought of anything else"] (*Conv.* II xii 6–8).

11. Hollander, "Canto II" 30.

12. Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory* 208, rejects the notion that Dante turned away from philosophy, using as examples Dante's *Epistle* XII iii 6, written in 1315, and his placement of Siger of Brabant in Paradise. I agree that Dante did not turn away from philosophy. What I believe he turned away from was the embrace of philosophy for its own sake. The study of philosophy is a worthy pursuit of which Dante is proud, but he must be mindful of the limits, as he himself makes clear at the start of *Inferno* 26. Dante is reminded of those limits in *Purgatorio* 25 when Statius, poised to explain to him the error of the wiser Averroes, commands Dante to be open to the truth before proceeding to deliver his explanation, which rejects Averroes' view that the possible intellect is separate from the soul. Dante the poet admires the pure philosophy of Averroes and refers to him as the one who wrote the "gran comento," but Averroes' inability to understand the limitations of his vision, like his fellow philosophers Aristotle and Plato, condemns him to the first circle of Hell.

13. I agree with the vast majority of modern scholars who accept the "cui" in 1.10.63 as a dative not an accusative, meaning that Beatrice, not Virgil, is held in disdain by Guido. Two studies that have done much to convince many Dantists are Siro A. Chimenz, "Il disdegno di Guido e i suoi interpreti," and Antonino Pagliaro, "Il disdegno di Guido."

14. See Lloyd Howard, "Giovanna as John the Baptist" 63–70. Dante's references in chapter XXIV of the *Vita Nuova* to Guido's estrangement from Giovanna suggest that he has turned instead to another lady, Lady Philosophy of his *canzone*: *Donna me prega*. But there is to be no reconciliation between Guido and Giovanna. Her call into the wilderness as John the Baptist will remain unheeded. Guido held in disdain the kind of journey to salvation that Dante has undertaken, and preferred to remain in the company of his Lady Philosophy in the wilderness, which will in all probability destine him to the sixth circle of Hell alongside his father.

15. See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* 135–53, where Dante's dream of the Femmina Balba relates to "interactions between imagination, love, knowledge, and moral choices articulated in the two previous cantos (*Purgatorio* XVII and XVIII)" (136).

16. Hollander, *Studies in Dante* 101–2, suggests that Lady Philosophy appears to Dante as the Femmina Balba in his dream in *Purgatorio* 19 where she attempts to lure Dante as she claims to have lured Ulysses. Hollander submits that her words "lo volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago / al canto mio" ["Ulysses, eager to journey on, I turned aside to my song"] support his argument "that the *Convivio* was Dante's Ulyssean embracing of false philosophy."

17. While the Femmina Balba claims as the sweet siren to have turned Ulysses from his way, we know from Homer's *Odyssey* that she did no such thing. As the readers of *Inferno* 26 recognize, this is not the first instance where Dante's rendering of Ulysses' voyage is at variance with Homer, and in both instances Dante's changes relate to Ulysses straying from his journey home. Bosco-Reggio suggest that Ulysses' surrender to the siren may have come from a medieval source unknown to us. They

also point out that these words are placed in the mouth of the vain Femmina Balba. Is she necessarily to be believed?

18. See the reference in chapter 4 n. 23 to Hollander, "*Purgatorio* XIX: Dante's Siren/Harpy" 79–80, who supports Gmelin's interpretation: "that simple and best hypothesis may not yet be said to have achieved common acceptance, even if most commentators do take note of the obvious echo of this passage in Beatrice's reproach to Dante in *Purgatorio* XXXI.45 . . . especially when we remember that in *Purgatorio* XXX.134, Beatrice says that she has previously tried to call Dante back to herself 'in sogno.'"

19. Singleton, *Purgatorio* 777, interprets "fedele" in this context "as one whose sins of backsliding have been forgiven."

20. Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision* 147, draws to our attention Dante's oblique reference to the Narcissus myth in *Purgatorio* 30.76–8, and Narcissus's thirsting for his own image, which leads to his fall and death once "he knows himself." Dante's journey to self-knowledge will not mirror Narcissus's. His thirst will be quenched, but the object of this thirst, Beatrice, will also be the one to force him to self-confrontation, allowing for true self-knowledge.

21. The formula "levai li occhi" ["I raised my eyes"] also appears in chapter XIV, where Dante sees Beatrice, with all the accompanying effects of love sickness: "e temendo non altri si fosse accorto del mio tremare, *levai li occhi*, e mirando le donne, vidi tra loro la genilissima Beatrice" ["Afraid that other people might notice how I was trembling, I raised my eyes and as they rested on the women gathered there I saw among them the most gracious Beatrice"].

22. The other four references to Phaeton's flight of folly occur in 1.17.106–8, 2.4.72, 2.29.118–20, and 3.17.1–3.

23. Storey, "Canto XXXI" 475, points to the intensification of the "occhi fissi e attenti" in *Paradiso* 33.97–8.

24. Porena, *Paradiso* 325.

LINO PERTILE

Does the Stilnovo Go to Heaven?

Something is missing from Dante's portrayal of love in the *Commedia*. At the beginning of the *Inferno* and at the end of the *Purgatorio* we find, respectively, love condemned (Francesca) and love reformed (Guinizzelli), but where is love rewarded, blessed, sanctified? Where is exemplary love?

The intellectual light that surrounds Dante's universe outside space and time is full of love (*Par* 30.40); love is what causes the angelic choirs to spin around God and, consequently, to turn the nine heavenly spheres; love is what makes the blessed want to come down to talk to the pilgrim, while in Paradise the pilgrim's mind in its turn appears more than ever in love with Beatrice. Moreover, as I have shown elsewhere, the language of desire permeates the third canticle to the point that even Dante's intellectual efforts to grasp a reality that is beyond his understanding is often portrayed in daringly erotic terms (Pertile 1990, 1993b, 1998).¹ But where is *earthly* love, the love in whose name God's creatures join together to be fruitful and multiply on earth (Gen 1:22, 8:17, 9:1 and 7)?

Its natural locus within the physical and moral structure of Dante's other world should be the sphere of Venus. But in point of fact, against all reasonable expectation, love is hardly mentioned in the Venusian sphere. The term *amore* naturally appears much more frequently in the text of the third canticle than anywhere else in the poem: to be precise, it occurs 85 times in

From *Dante for the New Millennium*, edited by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey, pp. 104–14. Copyright © 2003 by Fordham University Press.

the *Paradiso*, 50 in the *Purgatorio* and 19 in the *Inferno*. These figures become even more significant if we consider the textual segments from which the word *amore* is absent: 26 cantos in the *Inferno*, 11 in the *Purgatorio*, and 4 in the *Paradiso*. Oddly enough, however, one of the four *Paradiso* cantos from which *amore* is absent is canto 9, which is one of the two cantos set in the Heaven of the *bella Ciprigna*. What is the meaning of this paradoxical fact?

The souls of Venus are so full of love (“sem sì pien d’amor”) that, to satisfy Dante’s desires, they are ready to interrupt the singing and dancing with which they accompany the circular motion of the Principalities (*Par* 8.34–39). However, this *amor* corresponds more closely to charity or kindness than to love. In any case it is hardly a distinguishing feature of this Heaven, for it is common to all the spirits of Dante’s Paradise. In fact, Charles Martel, the first spirit the pilgrim meets in the sphere of love, does not seem to be there, as far as we know, as a result of any special association with love. The son of Charles d’Anjou, Charles Martel died in 1295 at the age of twenty-four. In a lovely *terzina* he mentions Dante’s affection for him and his affection for Dante:

Assai m’amasti, e avesti ben onde;
che s’io fossi giù stato, io ti mostrava
di mio amor più oltre che le fronde.
(*Par* 8.55–57)

You loved me much and had good cause for that; for had I stayed below, I should have showed you more of my love than the leaves alone.²

But he moves on swiftly to talk about other things—the lands he was due to inherit when he died, and the cause why so often parents and children differ so much in disposition. Why then should he be in the Heaven of Venus? Some commentators argue that Charles is rewarded here for his love of justice and good government, a love that is clearly evident from his discourse, and seems to be associated with the “good” influence of Venus. However, this kind of love has nothing in common with the phenomenon to which Dante devotes one circle in Hell and a terrace in Purgatory.

The other three souls we encounter in the Heaven of Venus (*Par* 9) are Cunizza, Folquet, and Rahab. All three clearly belong to the venereal type. However, it is not as love heroes that they are rewarded here, but as repented lovers. Cunizza’s love affairs were all too well known before she converted in old age: here she deplores the Venetian population’s indifference to any kind of goodness; Folquet admits he loved with greater ardor than Dido had: here, however, he denounces the accursed florin “c’ha disviàte le pecore e li agni”

(“that turns both sheep and lambs from the true course” [*Par* 9.131]); finally, Rahab is the biblical prostitute who saved herself not through an act of love, but by favoring Joshua’s capture of Jericho. In short, these souls do not find themselves in Paradise *because* they loved, but *in spite of* their having loved. They are here because, though “il folle amore” (“frenzied love” [*Par* 8.2]) ruled their lives, they eventually were able to free themselves of its yoke. They are not unlike Francesca and Paolo, but, in contrast to them, they survived their sin and conquered it. The Heaven of Venus is unique in Dante’s Paradise in that it seems to be inhabited only by those spirits who *resisted* the influence of *folle amore*.

In *Purgatorio* 18 Virgil explains that, while all love is natural and potentially good, only love that is governed by reason is morally praiseworthy (VV. 40–75). Virgil’s discourse represents a significant correction of Francesca’s fatalistic view of love as a totally irresistible natural force—a view that Dante himself had expressed in both the *Vita Nova* and some of his late lyrics such as the so-called *canzone montanina*, *Amor, da che convien pur ch’io mi doglia*, and the sonnet to Cino da Pistoia, *Io sono stato con Amore insieme*. Conversely, what seems to triumph in Virgil’s speech is the view ostensibly espoused by Dante in another of his late lyrics, *Doglia mi reca*, where the ideal of a rational love, “d’orto di ragione” (“of reason’s garden” [V. 147]), is opposed to the practice of lustful love as “appetito di fera” (“bestial appetite” [V. 143]).³ Thus, *Purgatorio* 18 seems to bring to a final and positive resolution a conflict that existed in Dante’s mind as late as 1307–8 when he is believed to have written both the lyrics mentioned above and the first cantos of the *Inferno*. But, if a “giusto amor” (*Purg* 18.96) does indeed exist, where is it to be found in Dante’s Heaven?

There is no exemplary husband or wife in the sphere of Venus, no positive correlative of Francesca’s negative model. To put it in Boccaccian terms: in Dante’s Heaven of Love we do not find a Griselda, a Lisabetta da Messina, or a pair of chaste but unlucky lovers such as Girolamo and Salvestra. Dante does not think of a love in which *eros* and *agape* might be joined in a just and harmonious equilibrium. He does not even suggest that there might be a middle way between adulterous and mystical love. Indeed, if we consider the three most memorable female figures of the *Comedy*—Francesca, Pia, and Piccarda, excluding for the time being Beatrice—we are bound to conclude that Dante must have had a rather grim idea of marriage, conjugal relationships, and physical love in general. That is why, after all, the space allotted to love in Dante’s Heavens still lies within the shadow of the earth—that is, below the line where untainted goodness starts. This point becomes even more apparent if we consider a detail in the seventh terrace of his Purgatory.

We know that, for each vice it corrects, Dante’s Purgatory exhibits examples of the opposite virtue. In the seventh terrace the souls of the lustful purge

themselves of Venus's poison by crying out examples of chastity. The first two are canonical examples of total chastity, one Christian and historical—the Virgin Mary—and the other pagan and mythological—the goddess Diana. However, the third example is different and rather problematical: “*indi donne / gridavano e mariti che fuor casti / come virtute e matrimonio imponne*” (“and they praised aloud those wives and husbands who were chaste, as virtue and as matrimony mandate” [*Purg* 25.133–35]). It is not clear whether the lustful cry out specific *names* of exemplary husbands and wives without mentioning them in the text, or whether they actually invoke, as seems to be the case, the entire category of chaste spouses. This occurrence is unique in the poem, and goes against its internal rules: Dante quotes a general example that by its nature is devoid of exemplary value and therefore useless—as Cacciaguida will explain at the end of *Paradiso* 17. But why? Quite simply because he cannot conjure up one single exemplary instance of blessed earthly love.

This absence contrasts sharply with the glorification, for instance in *Tundale's Vision*, of “the married, both men and women, who did not mutually befoul their marriage by the stain of illicit adultery and who served the faith of legitimate union” (ch. 19: The Glory of the Married). It is indeed significant that, compared to the popular visions, Dante is much less harsh in punishing the lustful, but he totally neglects to reward legitimate lovers.

It is surprising to discover that there is more love in the Heaven of the Sun than in that of Venus. *Paradiso* 10, the first devoted to the Sun after the two Venusian cantos, begins by singing the love that makes the world go round with such marvelous order:

Guardando nel suo Figlio con l'Amore
che l'uno e l'altro eternalmente spira,
lo primo e ineffabile Valore
quanto per mente e per loco si gira
con tant' ordine fé, ch'esser non puote
sanza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira.
(*Par* 10.1–6)

Gazing upon His Son with that Love which One and the
Other breathe eternally, the Power—first and inexpressible—made
everything that wheels through mind and space so orderly that one
who contemplates that harmony cannot but taste of Him.

It ends with the dance and song of the wise spirits celebrating their love for each other and for God. Their circular motion is described in suggestively erotic terms that perhaps might have been more appropriate under Venus.

Indeed, it is as though the poet were releasing now the kind of language that he had suppressed in the previous Heaven:

Indi, come orologio che ne chiami
 ne l'ora che la sposa di Dio surge
 a mattinar lo sposo perché l'ami,
 che l'una parte e l'altra tira e urge,
 tin tin sonando con sì dolce nota,
 che 'l ben disposto spirto d'amor turge;
 così vid'io la gloriosa rota
 muoversi e render voce a voce in temprà
 e in dolcezza ch'esser non pò nota
 se non colà dove gioir s'insempra.
 (*Par* 10:139–48)

Then, like a clock that calls us at the hour in which the Bride of God, on waking, sings matins to her Bridegroom, encouraging His love (when each clock-part both drives and draws), chiming the sounds with notes so sweet that those with spirit well-disposed feel their love grow; so did I see the wheel that moved in glory go round and render voice to voice with such sweetness and such accord that they can not be known except where joy is everlasting.

In this context Saint Francis of Assisi becomes Dante's champion of perfect love. Significantly, Francis's marriage to Lady Poverty is the only example of conjugal love that the *Comedy* celebrates and exalts. Physical love becomes acceptable at last, though only as a metaphor which is spiritually fulfilled after the death of the body in a relationship with God in which desire is always satisfied without ever being extinguished.

Thus, it seems that for Dante no heavenly Venus is to be found either alongside, or in opposition to, the earthly, sensual, sinful, and socially disruptive one. The *maritalis affectio* or *conjugales amor* so often celebrated by the Fathers of the Church does not seem to exist for him. The matrimonial variety of love is represented in the *Comedy*, and only incidentally, by Nella Donati, Forese's "vedovella" ("gentle widow" [*Purg* 23.92]). However, apart from the ironically palindomic quality of the episode—if the *tenzone* is indeed authentic—Nella's example is evoked in the context as the exception that confirms the rule. In fact, we owe to Forese the most ferocious and sinister of Dante's invectives against women in general and Florentine women in particular. In sum, sensual love, in all its forms and gradations, is viewed in the poem as an essentially pathological condition, a perverse affliction ("mal

perverso" [*Inf* 5.93]) from which the soul must be released if she is to climb to Heaven. Was the Cavalcanti of *Donna me prega* right then, and does Dante acknowledge it *de facto* if not verbally?

Of course, there is love in the *Paradiso*, but compared to the two earthly realms, it seems to be a radically different phenomenon. As we proceed from canto 9, in the Heaven of Venus and Love, to canto 10 in the Heaven of the Sun and Wisdom, the brightness of the blessed is such, even in relation to the sun's, that the poet is unable to portray it. Beatrice invites him to thank God for having raised him so high, and Dante obeys with such ardor that he forgets her: "e sì tutto 'l mio amore in lui si mise / che Bëatrice eclissò ne l'oblio" ("and all my love was so intent on Him that Beatrice was then eclipsed within forgetfulness" [*Par* 10.59–60]). However, far from taking offense for this forgetfulness, Beatrice smiled, being obviously pleased at her pupil's signs of spiritual progress. Thus, Minerva replaces Venus, Wisdom replaces Love.

This episode is very significant. On the one hand, it corrects the case of Dante's retrograde neglect of Beatrice as related in the *Vita Nova* and condemned in the Earthly Paradise; on the other, it anticipates the journey's and the poem's final moments, when Dante will find himself alone before the ultimate vision. Forgetting Beatrice is acceptable and positive, and may even be necessary, as we will see, as long as it is as a result of a flight *in suso*, a motion heavenward, not *in giuso*, downward, the direction Dante had moved morally after the death of the *beatissima*:

e se 'l sommo piacer sì ti fallio
per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale
dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?

Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale
de le cose fallaci, *levar suso*
di retro a me che non era più tale.

Non ti dovea gravar le penne *in giuso*,
ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta
o altra novità con sì breve uso.

(*Purg* 31.52–60; emphasis added)

and if the highest beauty failed you through my death, what mortal thing could then induce you to desire it? For when the first arrow of things deceptive struck you, then you surely should have lifted up your wings to follow me, no longer such a thing. No green young girl or other novelty—such brief delight—should have weighed down your wings, awaiting further shafts.

In other words, with her body out of the way, Dante was expected to love Beatrice more, not less. The implication is that true love must ultimately surpass the object of its desire. To achieve the ultimate purpose of the journey, the pilgrim must learn to direct all his love toward God, thus leaving behind not only Virgil but even Beatrice, to the point of forgetting her. The aim of true love is to reach beyond human love. Only then does it reach the love of God, for “*Regnum celorum* violenza pate / da caldo amore e da viva speranza / che vince la divina voluntate” (“*Regnum celorum* suffers violence from ardent love and living hope, for these can be the conquerors of Heaven’s Will” [*Par* 20.94–966]).

This is what happens in the Empyrean, when Dante suddenly realizes that Beatrice is no longer with him. As the old man who has replaced her tells him, Beatrice has once more taken her place in the great rose of the blessed. Dante gazes at her from afar, and the last words he addresses to her are not a lover’s adieu, but the prayer of one of the faithful (*Par* 31.79–90). He thanks her as one thanks a saint who has granted a grace. There is no mention in his speech of his love for Beatrice or of her love—but was it love?—for him. Veneration and gratitude, yes, but not earthly love. The ancient flame that flared up the moment he intuited her presence in the Earthly Paradise, where is it now?

Beatrice smiles and for a moment she looks toward Dante, “poi si tornò a l’eterna fontana” (“Then she turned back to the eternal fountain” [*Par* 31.93]). Borges writes that these are “los versos más patéticos que la literatura ha alcanzado,” for at the end of the poem written for her they say that Beatrice is irretrievable. The truth, of course, is that it is Dante the writer who decides to distance Beatrice to the point of removing her from the stage before the pilgrim reaches his final destination. The question is why does he do it, and why will Saint Bernard do where Beatrice will not: what strategy lies behind these changes?

I would like to suggest that, if Dante removes Beatrice, it is because her presence is no longer necessary; it may, in fact, even get in the way of Dante’s final achievement. Ultimately, Beatrice must go, not because she loves God more than Dante, as Borges seems to imply, but because Dante must be shown to love God more than he loves Beatrice. All love becomes love of God in Heaven, and it excludes *stilnovo* love as much as *maritalis affectio*. This is why Beatrice’s replacement cannot take place directly on the axis of sublimated eroticism—for example, through the Virgin Mary—but on that of sanctity, through a *sene* who, being holy, old, and male, is above all suspicion of concupiscence. Let me clarify this point.

When he unexpectedly materializes, Saint Bernard appears not as a *deus ex machina* but as another link, a new mediator between Dante and the Virgin, and therefore his apparition, justified as it may be externally on the basis of

his well-known Marian devotion, does not seem to be narratologically cogent. The question is: why could not Beatrice herself recommend Dante directly to Mary? A question that becomes even more disturbing if we consider that, as a result of this change of mediator, the last words entrusted to the *beatissima*, at the end of *Paradiso* 30, turn out to be a prophetic condemnation of Pope Clement V, who, she says, by joining the simonists, will push further down the soul of Boniface VIII—hardly a suitable parting speech from the lady who has shaped the entire life of her poet.

My feeling is that something does not quite jibe in this final section of the poem. Indeed, I would like to try out a conjecture of mine that may help us to better understand what is going on here. My hypothesis is that Saint Bernard may not have been in Dante's original plans for the conclusion of his poem. The evidence I can summon up in support of this idea is circumstantial, but compelling.

In the second canto of the *Inferno* Virgil tells Dante that “tre donne benedette” (“three blessed women”) are concerned for him “nella corte del cielo” (“within the court of Heaven” [*Inf* 2.24–25]): the Virgin Mary, Saint Lucy, and Beatrice. The initiative to save Dante is triggered by the Virgin, who tells Saint Lucy, who in turn tells Beatrice. Finally Beatrice comes down and tells Virgil, who moves from Limbo to rescue the beleaguered poet. Many readers have noticed the exquisitely courtly atmosphere that characterizes the heavenly operations at this stage of the poem: the *stilnovo* register that so deeply colors the Virgin's speech to Lucy, Lucy's speech to Beatrice, Beatrice's speech to Virgil, and her parting tears.

This model is not taken up at the end of the poem. The court the pilgrim sees with his own eyes is not the court that Beatrice had described to Virgil and Virgil to Dante at the outset of the journey. However, what truly disrupts the model is Saint Bernard, for in the final chain of mediators between Dante and God, Saint Bernard takes over the position that at the beginning of the story was Saint Lucy's.

There is something odd about Saint Lucy. She is given quite a substantial role in the first two canticles. In *Inferno* 2 the Virgin speaks directly to her, describing Dante as her *fedeles* (V. 98), while Lucy speaks directly to Beatrice, urging her to go to help Dante who loved her so (V. 104). In *Purgatorio* 9 she transports the dreaming pilgrim from the Valley of the Princes to the gates of Purgatory, which she points out to Virgil with her beautiful eyes (*Purg* 9.52–63), thus prefiguring Dante's final approach to the ultimate vision in Paradise. Now, if at the end of the journey we found Saint Lucy instead of Saint Bernard, we would have no reason to be surprised at all. Indeed, Lucy would thus appear in three episodes, one in each canticle, and in the third she would hand over her *fedeles* to the Virgin, thus completing the mandate she

had received from the Virgin at the start of the action. The cycle would come to a close just where it started; the rescue operation would appear to be fully completed. We would have at the beginning Mary, Lucy, Beatrice, Virgil, and at the end Virgil, Beatrice, Lucy, Mary. Instead nothing of the sort. The third time Lucy appears, she is sitting idle in the Rose of the Blessed. Bernard points her out to Dante in a very concise tercet:

e contro al maggior padre di famiglia
siede Lucia, che mosse la tua donna
quando chinavi, a rovinar, le ciglia.
(*Par* 32.136–38)

And opposite the greatest father of a family, Lucia sits, she who urged on your lady when you bent your brows downward, to your ruin.

As a matter of fact, Lucy did much more than Bernard says; she is one of Dante's active "movers," yet Dante does not devote a glance or a word to her. Too little, in my opinion, for a character of such importance in the process of Dante's redemption. Lucy's failure to appear for a third time in an active role and to close the chain opened at the beginning strikes me as odd. I suggest it betrays a structural adjustment, a little earthquake that must have occurred after the writing of *Purgatorio* 9, where Lucy's position in the poem had been consolidated, and we had been given every reason to expect a third and final intervention on her part.

There is another notable and real structural adjustment in the third cantic. It concerns Beatrice, and it seems to go hand in hand with my hypothetical adjustment regarding Saint Lucy. As we know from *Inf* 10.130–32 and 15.88–90, Dante had originally planned that his exile would be fully revealed by Beatrice in Paradise. However, when he gets to Paradise, it is Cacciaguida who explains the dark prophecies the pilgrim heard from Farinata, Brunetto, and other characters. No doubt, Dante considers the change so necessary that he is willing to contradict himself in order to make it. But why make it?

Between *Inferno* 2 and *Paradiso* 31 lie practically the whole poem and probably about twelve years of exile. It is this experience in the poet's life, the new maturity he achieves through it, that makes him change his original plans. My suggestion is that the conception of love that characterized the *stilnovo* and determined the writing of *Inferno* 2 does not survive beyond Purgatory. The Beatrice whom Dante finds on the other side of the river Lethe goes already beyond the *stilnovo*—and, by guiding Dante through the heavenly spheres, she teaches him the same transcendence. But her replacement

by Cacciaguida, followed by her, or more likely Lucy's, replacement by Saint Bernard—significantly, two female characters replaced by two male ones—are two much more radical adjustments. Perhaps Saint Bernard embodies an ideal of chastity, spirituality, and mystical ardor that, deep in his consciousness, Dante feels unable to fully associate with Beatrice—or any woman for that matter. Be this as it may, the Empyrean, initially imagined as a ladies' court, is no longer a court at the end of the journey—let alone a ladies' court—and the love that is punished in Hell and purged in Purgatory is shown to have nothing in common with the otherworldly love that conquers the Heavens to reach beyond space and time. Between these two forms of love there is no mediation, no rational love capable of reconciling the love of the creator with the love of the creature. Which must imply—though I doubt this was Dante's intention—that Virgil's discourse in *Purgatorio* 18 was over-optimistic. In the *Comedy* rational love is a rarer phenomenon than the love of God.

Dante set off perhaps with the idea of consecrating the *stilnovo* at the end of his journey. In the event, he changed his mind, because on the way he discovered—he learned, he decided, he chose to show—that there is no room for earthly love in Paradise: *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle* and *amor ch'a nullo amato amar perdona* remain to the end powerful and irreconcilable adversaries.

NOTES

1. This essay is part of my ongoing research on Dante's language of desire: see Pertile 1990, 1993b, 1998. My views on the *stilnovo* are set out in Pertile 1993a. My warmest thanks to Tony Oldcorn whose reading considerably improved this essay.

2. Citations from Dante's *Comedy* are from Alighieri 1966–67; translations are from Mandelbaum 1982 and 1984.

3. The connection between *Inferno* 5, the *canzone* *Amor, da che convien*, the sonnet *Io sono stato con Amore insieme*, and *Purgatorio* 18 has been recently examined by Teodolinda Barolini in two innovative essays; see Barolini 1997 and 1998. In *Doglia mi reca* Dante writes of “amor fuor d'orto di ragione” (“love outside of reason's garden” [147]); Barolini argues that he thus “allows us to postulate its converse . . . an appetite that is human rather than feral and that resides *within* reason's garden” (Barolini 1998, 53). See also chap. 4 above. The link between Francesca's speech and *Io sono stato con Amore insieme* is particularly compelling as the sonnet implicitly compares love to a tempest that no amount of bell ringing (i.e., rational debate and counseling) will abate. On the custom of ringing bells to quell storms see Pertile 1996. The idea of love as a tempest that reason cannot restrain is present also in *Amor, da che convien*, VV. 26–27.

GIUSEPPE MAZZOTTA

*The Heaven of the Sun: Dante Between
Aquinas and Bonaventure*

Dante's encounter with Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas Aquinas in the heaven of the sun (*Paradiso* 10–14) marks a radical turning point in the poet's thinking. He confronts the philosophical-theological speculations of the two great masters of the thirteenth century. With them, he focuses on a number of doctrinal controversies in which their fraternal orders and they themselves were engaged. And through them he seeks to reconstitute the vast circle of Christian wisdom: wisdom as a whole and the whole of wisdom.

Scholars have long examined the rhetorical construction and some of the themes unfolded over these cantos. Above all, they have underlined the chiasmus that shapes *Paradiso* 11 and 12: Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure tell the lives of, respectively, Saint Francis and Saint Dominic and attack the degeneration of Dominicans and Franciscans. One scholar in particular, Charles T. Davis, has studied the controversy over the poverty of the mendicant orders and its implication for the orders' self-understanding and role they expect to play in history.¹ Are they the prophetic sign of the spiritual, chiliastic new age heralded by Joachim of Flora's *Evangelium Aeternum*? Is a new age of the Spirit, which supersedes the age of the Son, the apocalyptic time of the end and of renewal, really at hand? Are the friars utopian visionaries bent on escaping the demand of history? Or are they impostors?

From *Dante for the New Millennium*, edited by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey, pp. 152–68. Copyright © 2003 by Fordham University Press.

The fierce opposition by Guillaume de Saint Amour to the friars as pseudo-apostles; the Joachistic rigorism of Gerardo da Borgo San Donnino; the satire by Jean de Meun, which finds its prolongation in the attacks against the Franciscans in *Il Fiore*—all triggered impassioned refutations by both Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas. Their opuscles, *Apologia pauperum* and *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum*, witness their concerted effort to offset the challenges mounted against the religious orders from many fronts—intellectual, moral, and theological.

In the wake of Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure, Dante rejects the anti-fraternal attacks by the secular masters. Like them, he also rejects the millennial prophecies endorsed by the Spirituals, as if their millennialism short-circuited history and time. But Dante also goes to the very roots of the theological, philosophical, and moral crisis. The novelty of his discourse, his deliberate self-insertion into the philosophical-theological debates of the thirteenth century, which are crystallized in the thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure, has not yet been fully grasped. To do so, it is necessary to highlight the three major conceptual-metaphorical patterns organizing the cantos in the heaven of the sun.

One of them is Dante's reconstitution of a new Christian *mathesis*. I have discussed this issue in *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Mazzotta 1993, especially 96–115). I did not show there, however, the imaginative and logical links existing between this question and the other two conceptual concerns in the cantos. One of them is the sustained theological discussion of the Trinity. The other is the economy of gifts, which involves the insight into the generosity of creation as well as the practice of poverty. The purpose of this essay is to unveil these three discursive patterns in these cantos, argue for their purposes, and show how they shed light on one another.

The new Christian *mathesis* Dante envisions would exceed both the classical model of knowledge (i.e., the Aristotelian division of the sciences and the tripartite Platonic scheme of philosophy) and the medieval rhetorical-grammatical models of education (i.e., Isidore of Seville, Brunetto Latini, etc.). In the heaven of the sun Dante represents the encyclopedic order of the arts and sciences rooted in the teachings of both Bonaventure and Aquinas. Dante wants to overcome and heal the deep rifts that separate philosophers and theologians. The philosophers (who are the neo-Aristotelians and, as far as the Oxford Franciscans go, they would include Saint Thomas Aquinas himself as a neo-Aristotelian) entertain grave doubts on the epistemological value of theology.

The reason for these doubts is clear. It is said to produce uncertain knowledge. Over and against the theologians, the philosophers affirm the primacy of philosophy as the only reliable rational activity and cast theology as a province of philosophy. On the other hand, the theologians, such as

Bonaventure, enthrone theology as the queen of the sciences; they are equally skeptical about the claims of philosophy's reliability and rigor. For Dante, the epochal rift (which goes back to Alfarabi, Averroës, and Maimonides) is solved through poetry, the art variously slandered by philosophers and theologians alike.

Dante features the new *mathesis*, more than an artificial inventory of subdivisions and classifications of sciences that would cover and arrange the hierarchy of arts and sciences, as a cosmic dance by the chorus of souls in *Paradiso* 10. We are in the cosmology of the *Timaëus* read through the commentary by Chalcidius.

As in Chalcidius, the dance represents an orderly, circular arrangement that would reflect the musical perfection of the cosmos. The heaven of the sun is also the heaven of arithmetic. Since Pythagoras, it was thought that the most profound mysteries of knowledge were hidden in numbers and that the empire of number was sovereign. The dance of the wise spirits around the sun captures the rhythm (which is number) of the cosmos. It identifies knowledge as a playful dance of wisdom: a round knowledge, as in a circle, wherein knowledge's origin is knowledge's end. If the circle tropes the endless circulation of knowledge, a totality made of distinct points, the chorus blends the various voices into the harmony of the unison.

These voices belong to and evoke real, historical figures. Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure proceed to enumerate them one by one. In the first wheel we find Albert the Great, Aquinas himself, Gratian, Peter Lombard, Solomon, Dionysius the Areopagite, Orosius, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Bede, and Richard of Saint Victor. The twelfth spirit is Siger of Brabant, who is said to have lived in Paris. His radical Aristotelian views about the unity of the separate intellect were refuted by Aquinas in his *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas* and by Bonaventure in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*.²

On his part, Saint Bonaventure enumerates a second ring of wise spirits that symmetrically completes Saint Thomas's list. He names Hugh of Saint Victor (whose *Didascalicon* is the model for Bonaventure's own *De reductione artium ad theologiam*); Peter of Spain; Peter Lombard; the prophet Nathan (whose Hebrew etymology is translated as "dans sive dantis" [see Sarolli 1971, 231]); Chrysostom; Anselm; Donatus; and Rabanus Maurus. The last figure he mentions—as a symmetrical counterpart to Siger of Brabant—is Joachim of Flora. His commentary on the Apocalypse (*Expositio in Apocalypsim*) interprets history according to a Trinitarian model, as a tripartite succession of ages—the age of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Bonaventure had found Joachim's Trinitarian scansion of history heretical.

The presence of Siger of Brabant in the encyclopedic compass traced by Saint Thomas obeys the principle of wisdom as a reconciliation of contradictory

viewpoints. I have given a detailed analysis of Dante's representation of Siger in *Dante's Vision* and, for the sake of clarity, will recapitulate here the main points of my argument. Siger is said to have lived in Paris, the city of philosophy, where he spent his time "leggendo" (*Par* 10.137). *Lectio* is a technical term for comments and glosses on philosophical texts. He reads in the "Vico de li Strami." He is literally on the way. Why does Dante give the philosopher's domicile?

We are only too familiar with the idea of philosophy as a journey and a quest: the route of Parmenides, the Odyssey of the soul, Ulysses' sea-journey, the pilgrim's exodus, etc. Thinking—this is the meaning of the metaphor—is an adventure, a risky exploration of unknown and unfamiliar regions of the mind, and it entails error and possible shipwreck. Aquinas had theorized about the "quinque viae" by which he comes to know God's existence. Siger is a logician, and logic conventionally provides a *method* or way. "Vico" is a metaphor that places Siger on a spiritual itinerary; it describes the movement of the mind engaged in syllogisms and in the pursuit of "invidiosi veri" (*Par* 10.138).

In the "rue de la Fouarre" Siger was absorbed in deep thoughts ("pensieri gravi" [*Par* 10.134–35]). "Pensiero," etymologically, means suspension; it conveys the sense of the *impasse* of the mind caught in irresolvable paradoxes as it journeys to the realm of the truth. The "veri"—the object of the logician's quest—are the questions of the eternity of the world, the unity of the intellect, and the relation between necessity and free will. Dante calls them "invidiosi," and the adjective, from *non-video*, suggests that the truths Siger seeks are not logically *evident* or demonstrable. In short, Siger—like Aquinas himself—casts logical reason as the preamble of faith and philosophy as a necessary step to theology. The inclusion of Joachim of Flora in the dance of the wise spirits is no less surprising than that of Siger. Historians have documented the critical role Joachim's doctrines played in Franciscan circles. They have especially stressed its impact on the rigorism of the Spirituals. Both Salimbene in his *Cronica* and Angelo Clareno suggest that John of Parma, Saint Bonaventure's predecessor as general of the Order, held Joachistic views. These views came to be considered heretical by Pope Alexander IV and by Bonaventure. Joachim's announcement of the imminent advent of a new, third age of the Spirit signaled a *de facto* dissolution of the doctrine of the Trinity.³

The mystical monism of Joachim's apocalyptic vision—at least the way the Spiritual Franciscans understood him—bears no real affinity with Plotinus's Mystical One, who is beyond all being, is unnamable, but still produces all things. But Bonaventure draws a parallel between Joachim's vision of a pure, new age of the Spirit and Plotinus's claim of philosophical illumination. Both bring about a "false beatitude," a premature divinization or perfection of man. And both strip life of the infirmity of mendicancy, which, for the Franciscan Bonaventure—a true follower of the "poverello"—is the realistic,

authentic mark of the human condition. The parallelism between Joachim and Plotinus is put forth in Bonaventure's *Collationes in Hexaemeron*. The text is an important, though so far unacknowledged, source for Dante's representation of the heaven of the sun.

Left unfinished, the *Collationes* contain twenty-three lectures Bonaventure delivered at the University of Paris during the Easter season of 1273. Like some of his other works, the *Collationes* have a synthetic character. Arranged according to an encyclopedic principle, they gloss primarily Solomon's Book of Wisdom as well as the philosophy of Socrates and Aristotle. The commentary encompasses the fundamental themes constantly engaging Bonaventure's thought: the relation between theology and philosophy or the secular sciences and revelation; subtle speculations on the Trinity and arithmetic (above all, on the numbers 12 and 7); meditations on the freedom of God's creation of the world out of nothing; the Incarnation, with Christ the mathematical center of the cosmos; the gifts of the intellect; the "defects" of the philosophers; the light of the sun; the gates of wisdom; etc. Two of the conferences—6 and 7—focus on a radical critique of both the Parisian neo-Aristotelians and Plotinus's idea of intellectual illumination. Bonaventure singles out Averroës, "the commentator," and "his followers" (such as Siger of Brabant, who, however, is not mentioned by name) for their doctrines about the eternity of matter and the world and their skepticism about the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul. Plotinus's notion of intellectual or philosophical beatitude, on the other hand, is said to falsify the hardships and miseries of physical reality.

Dante accepts the Franciscan substance of Bonaventure's vision about the mendicancy or poverty of the human condition. Like Bonaventure, moreover, he rejects the principle of an autonomous philosophical knowledge: Siger's own philosophical work is seen as a preparatory journey on the way to truth. And, like Bonaventure, Dante "reduces" the encyclopedic ladder of arts and sciences to theology. There are cracks, however, in Bonaventure's model, and Dante exposes them in order to repair them.

The *Collationes in Hexaemeron* polemically juxtapose to one another three distinct theologies of history. One intuitively, let it be said *en passant*, the influence of Joachim of Flora's tripartite division of history. Bonaventure dismisses the linear succession of the Joachimistic pattern. He presents, rather, the Averroist or Muslim theology of history, wherein the whole of creation and history is shaped by a wholly transcendent creator. The second theory of history is the Plotinian-Joachimistic speculation about God's total immanence in creation. For Plotinus there may be an infinite gulf separating the One from the world. Yet his insistence on intellectual beatitude—just like Joachim's third age of the Spirit—promises an apocalyptic, millennial time when evil is conquered and every hierarchical difference is abolished.

Between these two radically polarized conceptions stands Bonaventure's Incarnational Trinitarian theology as the mathematical "median" of reconciliation. The sharp, irreducible dualism of Averroës and the notion of God's diffusiveness everywhere are mutually exclusive. The Averroistic principle of an impassable abyss between the truth of faith and the truth of reason, God and man, immobilizes knowledge into separate spheres; it expresses itself as contempt for the human world, for it is unable to even posit that one can ever know the divine. Such a thesis is refuted by the very Neoplatonic principle of the diffusiveness of God through all the mobile gradations of being.

Dante accepts Bonaventure's Trinitarianism. Yet, he takes his distance from Bonaventure's assessment of Siger of Brabant and Joachim of Flora. Why? One answer lies in his insight into the dance of wisdom, wisdom as the whole he delineates. The more basic theological rationale for Dante's inclusion of mutually contradictory opinions is to be found in his version of the Trinitarianism he thematizes in the heaven of the sun. As the pilgrim ascends to the planet that radiates itself freely through the cosmos, he envisions a solar theoeconomy, which he derives from Franciscan spirituality. It is an economy of gifts that, gratuitously given, escape any possible commensurability and exclude only the principle of exclusion.

This Trinitarian pattern sheds light on the wisdom that is hidden in numbers. The text is punctuated by a lexicon that highlights numbers as well as the logical paradox of the one that is three and the three that are one. More than that, it evokes the heretical doctrines on the Incarnation by Sabellius and Arius (*Par* 13.127–29), while a hymn to unitrinitarianism is intoned:

Li si cantò non Bacco, non Peana,
ma tre persone in divina natura,
e in una persona essa e l'umana.
(*Par* 13.25–27)

They sang not Bacchus, and not Paeon, but Three Persons in the
divine nature, and it and the human nature in one Person.
(trans. Singleton [Alighieri 1975, 143])

The hymn anticipates the melody—Neoplatonic in substance—which is sung while the pilgrim leaves behind the heaven of the sun and is about to enter the planet Mars:

Quell' uno e due e tre che sempre vive
e regna sempre in tre e 'n due e 'n uno,
non circunscritto, e tutto circunscrive,

tre volte era cantato da ciascuno
di quelli spirti . . .
(*Par* 14.28–32)

That One and Two and Three which ever lives, and ever reigns in
Three and Two and One, uncircumscribed, and circumscribing all
things, was thrice sung by each of those spirits . . .
(trans. Singleton [Alighieri 1975, 155])

This Trinitarian motif, as a matter of fact, is ushered in at the very opening
of *Paradiso* 10, where Dante celebrates the inner life of the Godhead, whose
“spiration” displays itself as the process of production of the work of art:

Guardando nel suo Figlio con l'Amore
che l'uno e l'altro eternalmente spira,
lo primo e ineffabile Valore
quanto per mente e per loco si gira
con tant' ordine fé, ch'esser non puote
sanza gustar di lui chi ciò rimira.
Leva dunque, lettore, all'alte rote
meco la vista, dritto a quella parte
dove l'un moto e l'altro si percuote;
e lì comincia a vagheggiar ne l'arte
di quel maestro che dentro a sé l'ama,
tanto che mai da lei occhio non parte.
(*Par* 10.1–12)

Looking upon His Son with the love which the One and the
Other eternally breathe forth, the primal and ineffable Power made
everything that revolves through the mind or through space with
such order that he who contemplates it cannot but taste of Him.
Life then your sight with me, reader, to the lofty wheels, straight to
that part where the one motion strikes the others; and amorously
there begin to gaze upon that Master's art who within Himself so
loves it that His eye never turns from it.
(trans. Singleton [Alighieri 1975, 107])

The total order of the universe comes into being through God's creative,
generous fecundity. The order, which is a term for beauty, does not exist just
in the mind: it has an objective existence (see Foster 1972, 109–24; Maz-
zotta 1993, 277). The reader is invited to lift up his sight to the cosmic cross

formed by the intersection of the celestial equator and the ecliptic, the two oblique virtual circles traced by the sun's diurnal and annual motions.

Most simply, we are asked to be stargazers, to behold with a sense of wonder the spectacle of creation as a total gift of being, and so come to terms with the *givenness* of creation, its reduction to the perfection of art. What sustains this cosmic theodrama is the inner life of the Trinity. Bound by the breath of love, Father and Son gaze at each other. Their oneness exceeds number: they are at once one and three. From this theoeconomy of coincidence of opposites a different form of knowledge emerges. The human eye—which for Plato is the most sunlike of the organs of sense (*Republic* 508b)—can now see the source of all thought and life, which is the vital generosity of God. The metaphor of “filiation” (*Par* 10.1) suggests this much. In turn, the Father is called “*primo e ineffabile valore*” (V. 3): without a name, this Power has primacy. It is “*primo*” in that it is the first principle. Multiplicity comes from the “first.” It is first, moreover, because it precedes and transcends every number and accounting just as it gives life but is before all life. More than “something,” it is a nothing from which all things and beings derive.

This Trinitarian theology at the opening of *Paradiso* 10 differs markedly from Saint Augustine's *De Trinitate* as well as from Boethius's *De Trinitate* and Aquinas's commentary on it.⁴ Dante's view of God as generous source or inexhaustible *fons* appropriates Saint Bonaventure's doctrine in the *Collationes*, wherein creation as well as man emerge *ex nihilo*. Bonaventure, to be sure, echoes Augustine's view of creation out of nothing (*Confessions* 2.5–7; as well as *De Genesi ad litteram*). But he borrows the idea from Plotinus's metaphysics of the One as well as from the mystical theology of the pseudo-Dionysius in the *Divine Names*.

These texts do not merely add a mystical hue to the essentially rationalist façade of Dante's theology. They subsume his rationality in the larger view of knowledge as love. In both doctrines, the One, which is not a number, of its own nature, gives itself out without any jealous grudging and without ever exhausting the power of the source. The symbolic counter of this pure giving of oneself is the goodness of the sun. Plotinus echoes Plato's classic comparison of the sun with the good (cf. *Republic* 508 b–c; *Enneads* 5.16). In turn, the pseudo-Dionysius writes (*De divinis nominibus* 693b–696a):

Think of how it is with the sun. It exercises no rational process, no act of choice, and yet, by the very fact of its existence it gives light to whatever is able to partake of its light, in its own way. So it is with the good. Existing far above the sun, an archetype far superior to its dull image, it sends the rays of its undivided goodness to everything with the capacity, such as this may be, to receive it. . . . Such beings

owe their presence and their uneclipsed and undiminished lives to these rays. . . . They abide in the goodness of God and draw from it the foundation of what they are, their coherence, their vigilance, their home. Their longing for the good makes them what they are, and confers on them their well-being. Shaped by what they yearn for, they exemplify goodness and, as the law of God requires of them, they share with those below them the good gifts which have come their way.

(trans Luibhield [Pseudo-Dionysius 1982, 721])

In the pseudo-Dionysius's solar theology, creation is a divine economy of gifts wherein all entities are bound by mutual relationships. This theme runs through the *Celestial Hierarchy* (cf. *Paradiso* 28). It is the doctrinal watershed between Bonaventure, who in this case is close to Dionysius, and Aquinas, who is close to Saint Augustine. Aquinas's polemic with *On the Divine Names* (which he read in the translation of Scotus Eriugena) is best formulated by Étienne Gilson: "For Saint Thomas, God gives existence because he is the Act-of-Being. For Denis, God is beyond existence and being: the One gives being because it itself does not exist. . . . Hence . . . the invisible things of God (*invisibilia Dei*) cannot be known, if one begins from the created world" (1956, 139).

Over the five cantos comprising the heaven of the sun, Dante pulls together the negative theology of the pseudo-Dionysius and the Aquinas / Augustinian theology of creation out of nothing. God is both the first principle or no-thing and the Creator-Father. The harmonization hinges on the understanding of the divinity in terms of radical self-giving.

A question is in order. Why does Dante reflect on the Trinity at this point of the poem? The answer is as clear as it is compelling. The pilgrim is leaving behind the spheres touched by the earth's shadow. He stands at the threshold of the vaster universe beyond the sun. As Ulysses' "flight" beyond the sun showed, knowledge can be a tragic transgression. For Dante, this juncture of experience requires a turning point in consciousness: a more creative and incandescent phase of the imagination is needed. Now, more than ever before, he must grasp the meaning and place of man in the cosmos; he must rethink the nature and purpose of all traditional knowledge as well as the theological speculation bequeathed to him. While the vast infinity of space opens up before his eyes he asks what is man's vocation, whether man is still the measure of creation, and what does it mean to say, as the Trinitarian theoeconomy says, that man is in God's mind from the beginning, even from before the creation of the world.

These questions lie at the heart of the biographical accounts of Francis and Dominic. *Paradiso* 11 opens with an apostrophe against syllogisms that have slid into sophistry and weapons of power:

O insensata cura de' mortali,
 quanto son difettivi silogismi
 quei che ti fanno in basso batter l'ali!
 Chi dietro a iura e chi ad amforismi
 sen giva, e chi seguendo sacerdozio,
 e chi regnar per forza o per sofismi . . .
 (*Par* 11.1–6)

O insensate care of mortals! How false are the reasonings that make
 you beat your wings in downward flight. One was following after
 the laws, another after the *Aphorisms*, one was pursuing priesthood,
 and one dominion by force or craft . . .
 (trans. Singleton [Alighieri 1975, 119])

The lines cast, from a Franciscan perspective, a skeptical light on the logical-legal representation of knowledge. The epithet, “difettivi,” with its Bonaventurian resonance, draws the artifices of the logical method—the “silogismi”—within the specifically Franciscan insight into the poverty of philosophy and language. The two technical terms—“silogismi” and “sofismi”—deployed also by Cavalcanti⁵—convey specious arguments by which the discipline of logic is transformed into a strategy for the legitimation of the icons of power.

At stake in Dante's text is the *disowning* of knowledge in the recognition that reality, in its rich givenness, outstrips political and logical manipulations. To know the world is not to own it. At one extreme of Franciscan spirituality, Iacopone da Todi celebrates the necessary expropriation of reason, the necessary opposition between Paris and Assisi, as the sign of the madness of divine love. At the other extreme, Dante stages his provisional Franciscan skepticism about reason's self-degradation. He represents Saint Thomas, who, as if he had read Bonaventure's *Legenda*, tells the life of Saint Francis. Stripped of every ornament, the naked, poor life of the saint puts to work a simple truth: a man is what he loves and what he does.

In a transparent acknowledgment of Francis as poet of the “Canticle of Brother Sun” (or “Canticle of the Created Things”) and because we are in the heaven of the sun, Francis's birth is described as the rising of the sun at the Ganges and the world, “al mondo” (*Par* 11.50–51). These global coordinates are connected by a local topography, a particular “loco” (V. 52), the “Porta Sole” at Perugia and Assisi. At least since Cassiodorus, who at Vivarium rescues the texts of tradition from total effacement, the West questions itself and finds itself by looking at (in) the light of the East. Assisi's “proper” sense, we are told, is Orient (V. 54). The etymology places us at the threshold of a world he lets appear in the light of new, fresh perspectives.

Saint Francis ushers in the dawn of the world. He opens the gates on new horizons and starts up a global perspective on the local regions of the earth. In a lyrical passage of the *Collationes*, Bonaventure defines the sun as the “heart of the world” (1.19). For Dante, this is Francis, the “sun” on the world, who invites us to see in the light of good and peace. Francis “orients” and re-orientes the world: he challenges those who on the face of the earth have lost their way to see what they are and where they are. He asks those who do not know their way about what is man’s place. To be like the sun is to be everywhere and belong nowhere. More than that, to be like the sun is tantamount to giving of oneself and to being nothing.

In Dante’s text, this act of giving oneself is inseparable from the experience of being free. “Franciscus,” etymologically, means free. He is a free spirit who, in freeing himself of the empire of things, is a scandal to the laws of the world, turns upside down the “proper” values of the world. The pure emblem, in this solar, free economy of gifts, is found in the representation of Francis who strips away his clothes and marries Lady Poverty.⁶ As if to imitate the spiritual power of Francis’s nakedness, Dante himself tears up the veil of the allegory and lets us grasp its sense as the imitation of Christ. In this absolute nakedness (which contrasts with the apparent nakedness of philosophy, which, in fact, wraps itself in sophisticated conceits and mysteries) Francis owns nothing and loves literally no-thing. This will to nothingness climaxes in the spectacle of his *Christo-mimesis*. He divests himself of his very identity, no longer belongs to himself, and, like an actor in a theatrical *ludus*, impersonates Christ.

Francis’s ludic questioning of the values of the world has a counterpart in the canto of Saint Dominic. The birthplace of Francis evokes the East. Dominic is variously called “atleta”—athlete of God—“campione,” and, as if he were a knight errant in a love romance, “amoroso drudo” (*Par* 12.44–56). His birthplace is in the West, where the sun sets (*Par* 12.50). What seems to suggest decadence or the end of the day (or presage of the night) hides a new beginning. From the sunset a message of a new thought reaches the world: the announcement of a new knowledge that will reconcile the violence of factions.

In symmetry with the dramatic action in the preceding canto, *Paradiso* 12 stages the marriage between Faith and Dominic, faith and the “cherub” of knowledge. In the Thomist scenario of the encyclopedia, faith or theology is not juxtaposed to the sciences. Rather, it marks the road the philosophical sciences have to take. In this cherubic itinerary toward wisdom Dominic—like Francis earlier—loses all self-possession. The etymology of his name reveals it: he belongs and gives himself to his lord. And like a farmer in the fields of the Church, he is engaged in radical performances: he goes to the roots of

evil, he uproots the “sterpi eretici” (*Par* 12.100), digs to the foundations of philosophical errors encapsulated by the Albigensian heresy in *languedoc*.

Saint Francis preaches to the sultan. Unlike the crusaders, he wants to tear down by peaceful speech the theological barriers dividing Christians and Muslims. Bonaventure follows Francis’s example as he denounces the errors of Averroës. Saint Dominic turns against the asceticism of the Cathars, the *bons hommes* of mythical Provence. Caught in a doctrinal war, which Dante calls “civil war” (*Par* 12.108), Dominic is fierce with his enemies and finally wins. Chivalric love (which is not love of one’s enemies) and war define the burning passion of his life.

In the legends of the Cathars of Provence, amorous discourses and religious sectarianism overlap. As happens in the love poetry in *languedoc*, with its cult of adultery (which is the cult of a privileged, secret, even illicit and exclusive knowledge), the infidelity of the heretics comes forth as the impoverishment of universal ideas and shared knowledge. Their hidden sectarianism marks the triumph of surreptitious plots and private designs. Dominic, by contrast, asserts the solar transparency of language: in his universe names, if correctly interpreted, truly mean what they say. Consistently, he wants to challenge all sophistry and abolish all differences and equivocations of language and beliefs. His warlike disposition in pursuing the eradication of religious differences ends up paradoxically in perpetuating conflict. In point of fact, Dominic’s spiritedness and relishing of the clash of ideas shows that the quest for wisdom is not a univocally irenic exercise by which contradictions and antagonisms are reasonably worked out. Nonetheless, courageous action comes forth as the passionate nexus between philosophy and religious faith.

Dante’s text moves on to present an alternative to this logical model of thought by a bold appropriation of views formulated by Bonaventure and Thomas. As if in response to Bonaventure’s biography of Saint Dominic (in which the paradoxical logic of destruction prevails), Aquinas reappears on the scene. There is never, so he argues, an absolute knowledge, nor does a purely theoretical knowledge stand above practical reason. Instead, there is the need to join together the practical and the theoretical dimensions of philosophy. Ethics plays the role of joining theory and practice, philosophy and life. The reader is, thus, admonished not to judge prematurely (as both Aquinas himself and Bonaventure did with Siger and Joachim). Saint Thomas evokes the speculative errors of the Eleatics—Parmenides, Melissus, and Brison—as well as the evasiveness of their judgments (*Par* 13.126). Against Bonaventure, he picks up arguments he had laid out in *Super Boetium de Trinitate*. He stresses that the dissolution of the Trinity (which Bonaventure attributed to Joachim of Flora) was attempted by philosophers such as Sabellius and Arius.

In short, philosophical knowledge, separated from or closed to theological reflection, gets lost in the labyrinths of thought. By the same token, theology that is not buttressed by philosophy slides into fideism or mere opinion. The same thing occurs in those judgments that follow the winds of opinion and in the vulgar convictions that the depths of God's wisdom may be wholly fathomed. Aquinas asserts that we need prudence. This ethical virtue (akin to the virtue of art) was granted to Solomon, who appears here as the emblem of wisdom.⁷ Thomas's speech turns at this point into an explicit warning:

Non sien le genti ancor troppo sicure
 a giudicare, sì come quei che stima
 le biade in campo pria che sien mature;
 ch'i' ho veduto tutto 'l verno prima
 lo prun mostrarsi rigido e feroce,
 poscia portar la rosa in su la cima;
 e legno vidi già dritto e veloce
 correr lo mar per tutto suo cammino,
 perire al fine a l'intrar de la foce.
 (*Par* 13.130–38)

Moreover, let folk not be too secure in judgment, like one who should count the ears in the field before they are ripe; for I have seen first, all winter through, the thorn display itself hard and stiff, and then upon its summit bear the rose. And I have seen ere now a ship fare straight and swift over the sea through all her course, and perish at the last as she entered the harbor.

(trans. Singleton [Alighieri 1975, 149])

The admonition hinges on the connection between ethics and time. By picking up the central metaphor of the journey in the poem, it reminds us that we are at sea. And while we are at sea, our certainties are incomplete knowledge, likely to shipwreck in the risky turbulence of the voyage. Saint Thomas, the speculative thinker, focuses on the value of contingency (for which cf. ST 1a.82.1) and makes ethics (or prudence) the ground where theology and philosophy meet.

The grand philosophical-theological meditation that has been carried out over the heaven of the sun comes to a head with a humbling view of human beings caught in the tangle of contingencies. Dante proposes an ethics, evinced from his own poem, which grapples with the uncertain, risky outcome of time-bound experiences. The awareness of the adventurous quality of every endeavor is not meant to arouse terror. Rather, it defines Dante's ethics

of freedom. For to be at risk is to be free from the chain of causality and to share in the radical freedom and playfulness of God's creation.

I have argued in *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* that Dante delineates a *theologia ludens*. The point is simple. In the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* Dante affirms the sovereignty of an ethics of laws and prohibitions. But because every authentic ethics tends to its liquidation or eclipse, in the *Paradiso* (where there is no question of moral error) ethics is subsumed in *kalokagathia*, in the conjunction of the beautiful and the good of art. This conjunction crystallizes God's playfulness. Accordingly, the representation of *Paradiso* encompasses angelic "ludi": the play of God's creation, songs, cosmic dances, music, colors, and the aesthetics of the beautiful as well as the extended playful language in the cantos of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic. "Comedy," indeed, catches the ludic and joyful essence of God. In short, play, as an expression of freedom and pleasure, binds God to the chorus of his creation.

It is usually believed that the God of the Middle Ages is too stern to play or that, if he plays, he does not do it at random. But for Dante God plays. He is even a gambler. In *Purg* 16.90 the creation of the soul displays God's play. In *Purg* 6.1–9 God plays dice, "it gioco de la zara," and the stake consists in the salvation of the souls. The image primarily conveys the inscrutability of God's plan (just as inscrutable are the aleatory games played by Fortune in *Inferno* 7). It even suggests God's arbitrariness, his total freedom from the logical procedures that rule the most reasonable human constructions. There is even more, however, in the image of God's playing dice.

In the neo-Aristotelian debates of the thirteenth century, the questions of contingency, necessity, and chance figure prominently (see Maier 1983, 339–82). In 1277 Étienne Tempier condemns the proposition that denies that "nihil fit a casu" (article 21). The condemnation is directed against the natural philosophers who, in the wake of Aristotle's *Physics*, probe the principle of causality, chance, fate, and necessity. The figures who are involved in these debates are Avicenna, Averroës (*De fato et casu*), Siger of Brabant (*De necessitate et contingentia causarum*), and Saint Thomas Aquinas. The Scholastics investigate the logical relations linking causes and effects in the chain of nature, as well as the uncertainty in determining the consequences of an event. Dante shifts the debate from the order of nature to the order of love. In the love relation joining together God and man, the relation—as happens in every love experience—is always at risk. The risk is man's freedom. So that man may be truly free, the love God freely gives must be at risk.

In the vast arc of the heaven of the sun, Dante questions man's role in the borderless spaces of the universe. And he envisions a new, radical poetic-theological discourse that is not circumscribed within the context of millennial

expectations. It is open to the possibility of the encounter between man and God in the thousand-year-long voyage of the souls. Homeless on earth, man, who is always *en route* toward some distant destination, discovers that the universe, where he does not yet dwell, is where he belongs. The theology of both Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure agrees with this poetic insight.

These cantos have shown the pilgrim poised between the two masters of philosophy and theology. As biographers of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, they are above all teachers of life. Dante chooses them as his interlocutors, takes them along in his celestial journey but remains eccentric to their respective circles of knowledge. And he goes beyond them. He moves beyond the sun. By his poetry he opens up new vistas for theology as he crosses the unmapped spaces of the cosmos. Saint Francis, the Jongleur of God, goes to pray in the darkness of the night along the deep, scary precipices of Monte della Verna, where he receives his stigmata (*Par* 11.107). In this bare landscape of the soul, Francis captures the mortal risk of prayer, during which the soul hovers over the abyss of God's dark light.

By this intense rethinking of the Trinity, man's scope of knowledge, and man's ethics of freedom and giving, the *Divine Comedy* presents itself as a gift. The poet has received the gift by God's grace and, true to his name, he gives it to us. The gift does not belong to us. If anything we belong to it. As we are drawn into a circle of gifts, gift-giving appears to be more profound than any possession. It reveals to us that we share in a bequest, a legacy or pardon we can only pass on. As we stand with the poet at the threshold of a new millennium, he asks that we take his gift of the book as the book of forgiving.

NOTES

1. The fraternal controversies have been much examined in recent years. See Reeves 1964 and Davis 1980, 59–85 for further bibliography.

2. On Saint Bonaventure's thought see Guardini 1921; Bougerol 1961; Steenberghen 1966, 193–271; Vanni Rovighi 1974; Biffi 1984.

3. On this controversy cf. Ratzinger 1971.

4. The Boethian text is cited frequently in the *Collationes*. See, for instance, 4.12. For Aquinas's commentary on Boethius see Aquinas 1961.

5. "Da più a uno face un sollegismo . . . e come far potresti un sofismo" (VV. 1, 7).

6. On this standard motif of Franciscan iconography see Bonaventure 1934, V, 5.

7. On Solomon (and his "radiant and indefectible wisdom") see Bonaventure 1934, 2:6. The context of the discussion is the Book of Wisdom 6:12, which, clearly, is the theme of the heaven of the sun.

JOHN A. SCOTT

Dante's Other World: Moral Order

The Moral Order of *Inferno*

Inspired by a profound understanding of human nature, the poet delays all explanation of the ethical system underlying his *Inferno* until readers have accomplished almost one third of their infernal journey. At long last, in canto 11 (the number eleven implying sin, as it distances itself from the perfection of ten)—after the travelers have visited no fewer than six of the nine circles (and the pilgrim is as much in the dark as are readers of the poem)—Virgil delivers a lecture in which he uses the basic Aristotelian distinction between incontinence (*incontenenza*) and malice (*malizia*) to differentiate the sins punished in the first six circles from those found within the City of Dis. Clearly, the lower down the sin is placed, the graver and the more condemnable it is. And, as Virgil reminds his pupil (*Inf.* 11.79–84), the study of the seventh book of Aristotle's *Ethics* should have already taught him that incontinence denotes an inability to control one's passions, whereas sins of malice are committed through deliberate choice.¹ Thus, before reaching the walls of the City of Dis, the travelers pass through the circles of limbo or Lack of Faith, Lust, Gluttony, Avarice, and Anger. The fact that both avarice and its opposite, prodigality, are punished in the fourth circle illustrates another Aristotelian concept: that virtue is a golden mean between two extremes of vice—a truth reinforced in the very next circle, where the consequences of both anger and sloth (*accidia*) are punished.²

From *Understanding Dante*, pp. 191–211, 380–86. Copyright © by University of Notre Dame.

In lines 28–66, Virgil names many of the types of sin punished in Lower Hell. They are divided into sins of Violence (*Inf.* 12–17), Fraud (*Inf.* 18–30), and Treachery (*Inf.* 32–34). An outstanding omission in Virgil's catalogue is the sin of heresy, a sin of the intellect unknown to pagan antiquity.³ Since the moral order of *Inferno* is based on Aristotle's ethics, many critics have been led to claim that Dante was unsure where to place heresy. It is, however, clear that the poet was primarily concerned with the effects of sin on society. He therefore placed the heretics at the entrance to the City of Dis to give a dramatic illustration of the fact that the effects of heresy were utterly divisive, setting brother against brother, citizen against citizen. It is no accident that, among the heretics, the leader of the Ghibelline Party in Florence, Farinata degli Uberti, is forced to spend eternity next to one of the leaders of the opposing faction, Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti (*Inf.* 10.52–54)—thus anticipating the message of Florence's self-destruction through civil faction, hinted at in *Inferno* 13.143–50. Indeed, both faction and heresy destroy the community, for "every kingdom divided against itself shall perish, and every city or family divided against itself, shall fall" (Matt. 12.25). Unity and love are the hallmark of heaven, the City of God; division and hatred, that of hell, the Devil's City.⁴

The indissoluble link between Dante the Christian and Dante the citizen explains why the author of the *Comedy* chose to disagree with the redoubtable theologian Thomas Aquinas, by placing sins of violence in the seventh and sins of fraud in the eighth circles of his *Inferno*. St. Thomas (who plays an essential role in *Par.* 10–13) had declared that "other things being equal, it is a graver sin to harm someone openly, as by violence, than secretly" (Reade 1909, 350). Dante, on the other hand, places the fraudulent thieves in the seventh subdivision of the eighth circle (*Inf.* 24–25) but the violent highwaymen Rinieri da Corneto and Ranieri de' Pazzi in the first subdivision of the seventh circle (*Inf.* 12.135–38). For Aquinas, robbery was "a more grievous sin than theft" because of the "ignominy or injury to the person, and this outweighs the fraud or guile" implicit in theft (*S. Th.* 2.2.66.9, resp.). However, for the author of the *Comedy*, rather than injury to the individual, it is the community that is the chief victim: the overriding criterion is a political one that measures the harm inflicted on society and its members.⁵ In *Paradiso* 8.115–17, Charles Martel's question whether it would be worse for man if he were not a citizen obtains (for once) an unequivocal reply from Dante the wayfarer that human beings are destined to live as members of a community. In fact, the same Latinism *cive* (citizen)—here, denoting humanity's role on earth—is also used to indicate humankind's eternal destiny as citizens of God's City in *Purgatorio* 32.101–2.

The poet highlights the rupture of social bonds brought about by fraud through two physical breaks in the infernal landscape. The first is encountered

after the circle of Violence (*Inf.* 17); no paths lead down to the realm of Fraud in nether Hell, so that Dante and Virgil must be transported down there on Geryon's back. The second is the chasm with the pit of hell down below, where traitors are impaled in the ice of Cocytus—and which the travelers can reach only by being lifted down by the giant Antaeus, thus signifying the ultimate breakdown of civil society.

Although *Inferno's* moral scheme is Aristotelian in its overall divisions, the Greek philosopher did not tackle the question of whether sins of fraud are worse than sins of violence. On this issue, Dante found support for his visceral hatred of treachery in Cicero's *De officiis* 1.13.41, where he read: "While wrong (*iniuria*) may be committed, then, in two ways—either by force or by fraud—fraud seems to belong to the fox, force to the lion; both are most alien to man, but fraud is the more odious." Yet even though most commentators point to this source, they fail to note that while agreeing with Cicero that fraud is a worse category of sin than violence, Dante in fact ignores the animal imagery of the lion and the fox⁶ and—far from presenting fraud as "most alien to man"—he stresses that, while in hell it is practiced by Satan and his followers, on earth fraud is a virtual monopoly of humankind: *è de l'uom proprio male* (*Inf.* 11.25). Fraud is declared to be most hateful to God, because it implies misuse of the God-given intellect, the very faculty intended to distinguish human beings from beasts. Dante's condemnation of treachery was in fact so absolute that it led him to illustrate the quasi-heretical idea that certain acts of treachery are so utterly evil that they cause a human soul to be sent down to the pit of hell even before death overtakes the body (thus negating the possibility of conversion [cf. *Purg.* 3.133–35]), which is then governed by a devil for the rest of its time on earth (*Inf.* 33.124–38). This dramatically highly effective but theologically perverse concept was echoed by Chaucer in *The Man of Law's Tale* (2.778–84) and censored by the Inquisition in Spain.⁷ It may have been one of the reasons why the provincial chapter of the Dominican order banned Dante's works, in Florence, in 1335.⁸

The *Comedy's* message (reiterated in *Monarchia*) is that humanity on earth must live at peace, in a universal community where justice reigns supreme and where the Christian code of behavior is respected by all. Fraud and, above all, treachery make this impossible by destroying the natural bonds of love and trust that underpin society. As Dante had written in *Convivio*:

And those things which do not immediately display their defects are the more dangerous, because often we cannot be on our guard against them. This is what we find in a traitor: he puts on every appearance of being a friend and so earns our trust, but under the mask of friendship he conceals the fact that he is our enemy. (*Conv.* 4.12.3)

So, Charles de Valois entered Florence in 1301, under the guise of peace-maker sent by the pope. Using Judas's jousting "lance," however, he ripped open Florence's guts (*Purg.* 20.73–75). This royal Judas thus paved the way for Dante's sufferings and lifelong exile from the city and everything he loved most.

As defined in *Inferno* 11.52–53, treachery is fraud employed to harm someone who has reason to trust the traitor. It is, however, questionable whether all the sinners who would qualify as traitors are in fact punished in Cocytus. It may be argued that no figure in medieval society commanded more trust or obedience than the pope. Yet, it is precisely the pope who is ultimately responsible for the treachery and corruption that have made the world evil in 1300, since the whole world has been led astray by the terrible example set by an evil shepherd (*Par.* 18.125–26). The solemn injunction the Redeemer had given no fewer than three times to the first, archetypal pope was "Feed my sheep" (John 21.15–17).⁹ When Dante dares to condemn contemporary popes to hell, he accuses them of simony (the selling of holy things and ecclesiastical benefices) and places them in the third of the *Malebolge* (the subsections of the eighth circle, Fraud). The poet obliquely compares Nicholas III to a "perfidious assassin" (*Inf.* 19.50). As the false shepherd, he and other corrupt popes have ignored St. Peter's own exhortation to tend and feed God's flock "not for filthy lucre but of your own accord" (1 Pet. 5.2). Instead, they have turned God into a thing of gold and silver and made gold and silver into their gods (*Inf.* 19.112).

We must therefore ask ourselves whether, after reading such an impassioned attack, it is still possible to believe that the sin of simony constitutes simple fraud, committed against those who have no particular reason to trust you, as its placement in the eighth circle apparently declares (*Inf.* 11.54). Should it not in fact rank as treachery, the betrayal of a sacred trust? We must also ponder its ordering in the third subsection of the eighth circle, for in the fifth *bolgia* we find those guilty of the lay equivalent of simony: namely, barterry (the selling of civil honors and offices). We remember that Dante himself had been accused of this crime against the state. Can we really suppose that the poet of the *Comedy* judged the sale and corruption of temporal offices and privileges to be a graver sin than the sacrilegious bartering of sacred things, as his ordering would suggest? Dante's magical powers as a narrator may well lead us to forget that "for all its apparent objectivity, [the poem] is a representation . . . designed to promote the *illusion of objectivity*" (Barolini 1992, 15; my emphasis). The very punishment of the simoniac popes—the fact that they are buried upside down (*Inf.* 19.46)—reflects the fact that they had inverted God's moral order by selling things of the Spirit for material gain. The infernal rock in which they are imprisoned is, as we shall see, an infernal

caricature of the Rock of Faith, which remains as a perpetual indictment of St. Peter's unworthy successors whose avarice "corrupts the whole world, by trampling the good and raising up the wicked" (*Inf.* 19.104–5).

One possible explanation for the poet's choice of the third *bolgia* as the place where simony is punished is the significance of the number three as a pointer to the triune God (*VN* 29.3) and to the simoniacs' crime in selling the things of the Holy Spirit. Whether or not this be so, the fierce denunciation of Simon Magus in the opening lines and the passionate condemnation contained in the apostrophe to the simoniac popes in lines 90–117 express an anger that is hardly warranted by the sin's location, while it is in utter contrast to the "comic" episode of the barrators in *Inferno* 21–22.¹⁰ The emotional charge of this whole episode is in fact unique in *Inferno*, as the pilgrim's use of the word *folle* indicates in *Inferno* 19.88: "I do not know if I was now too brazen [*folle*, literally 'mad']".¹¹ This apparent inconsistency in the classification of the sin of simony (paralleled by the location of the violent against God, the blasphemers, who are found *before* the violent against nature) is a salutary reminder that the author of the *Comedy* was a poet and not a theological computer.

The Moral Order of *Purgatorio*

Unlike its forerunners, Dante's purgatory is quite different from his hell in many of its important features. First, it is utterly distinct, not only in its location but also in the fact that light and beauty are (intermittently) present. Second, the whole purpose of the purgative process is not to punish but to eliminate the seven capital vices and the stains left by sin, in order that the human soul may be reunited with its Creator. As Cogan (1999, 88) remarks succinctly, "What is corrected in Purgatory are vices, not actions." Although the concept of purgatory has been rejected by many Christians, its justification lies in the fact that, at the moment of death, most human beings would appear to require some form of purification before they are fit to enjoy the beatific vision and thus see the Godhead "face to face" (1 Cor. 13.12). Purgatory also stressed the unity of Christ's Church in its various forms: the Church Militant on earth; the Church Suffering in purgatory; the Church Triumphant in paradise. As the Council of Lyons proclaimed in 12–74, the prayers of members of the Church on earth help souls in purgatory, since the latter "are served by the suffrages of the living faithful, to wit, the sacrifice of the mass, prayers, alms, and other works of piety that the faithful customarily offer on behalf of others of the faithful according to the institutions of the Church."¹²

So, the souls Dante meets in *Purgatorio* remind him constantly of their need to be assisted by the prayers of the living: "for here we gain much from

those back there [on earth]" (*Purg.* 3.145). In fact, the souls are so insistent in their entreaties for help that the pilgrim turns to Virgil in apparent wonder, recalling *Aeneid* 6.376, where the Sibyl tells the wretched Palinurus to desist from hoping to change through prayer what has been decreed by the gods. Virgil explains that this was true when he had written his poem, at a time when pagan prayers were invalid. Now, however, "justice's peak is not lowered because the fire of love fulfills in an instant what those who are stationed here must satisfy" (*Purg.* 6.37–39). What must be satisfied is of course God's justice, which, in purgatory, is tempered by hope.¹³

In *Purgatorio* 16, the poem's central canto, the basic tenet of its moral system is affirmed against all those who believe in astral determinism or the omnipotence of human passion: God endows human beings with free will. Indeed, without this divine gift, "it would not be justice to have joy for good and mourning for evil" (*Purg.* 16.70–72). In other words, heaven and hell—the very stuff of Dante's Christian epic, the ultimate destiny of each human being—would be unjust. In the next canto (*Purg.* 17.91–139), Virgil asserts the fundamental principle that love is the source not only of all virtue but also of all sin. As Aquinas had affirmed (*S. Th.* 1.2.28.6, resp.): "Every agent, whatever it be, performs every action from love of some kind." Dante's poetic genius takes up this general law and applies it to the moral order of purgatory. As in *Inferno* (where Virgil explains the Aristotelian ordering of sins in hell only after the first six circles have been explored), so here the theoretical justification follows and illuminates the past experience of the encounters with souls on the first three terraces of the mountain. Whereas sins punished in hell are classified according to a tripartite Aristotelian-Ciceronian taxonomy (incontinence-violence-fraud), in purgatory the souls on their way to salvation are purged of their tendencies toward the seven capital vices—the first time that the latter are used as a taxonomy in descriptions of the other world.¹⁴ It is no longer sin but the tendency toward and the habit of sin that must be eliminated before the soul can be reunited with God.¹⁵ Just as the worst types of sin were punished in the pit of hell, so the logic of the purgatorial ascent requires that the worst vices (beginning with pride) be purified at the beginning, when the soul is farthest from God.

In *Purgatorio* 17.91–96 we learn that there are two types of love: the first is instinctive and placed by God in all his creatures (cf. *Par.* 1.109–20); the second requires human beings, who are endowed with reason and free will, to make a choice. The first is blameless; the second may err through being directed toward the wrong object or toward a good object but with defective or excessive energy. Thus, the first three terraces display souls guilty of directing their love against their neighbors (Pride-Envy-Anger),¹⁶ while on the fourth terrace souls are purged of their insufficient love of God and the good

(Sloth); on the last three terraces of the mountain, we find those who had loved secondary, transient goods to excess (Avarice-Gluttony-Lust).

According to tradition, the repentant souls in purgatory were purified by fire, in that this was "not only an essential, required accessory of purgatory but also, in many cases, its very embodiment."¹⁷ Dante's originality is striking in this respect, since fire is found on only *one* of the mountain's seven terraces: the last, where the tendency to lust is eradicated. It is significant that the pilgrim has to pass through the wall of fire, both as an indication of a general law that human beings must be purged of lust before union with God becomes possible and as a reminder of the myth that, since the Fall, Eden is inaccessible and sealed off by fire.¹⁸

Another telling example of the poet's originality is his invention of antepurgatory, a zone at the base of the mountain where various categories of sinners have to wait before they can venture into purgatory proper. All the souls vividly illustrate the Christian idea that it is only at the moment of death that the individual's fate is determined for all eternity. As Cogan (1999, 10) points out with admirable concision, "Virtue and vice, in Aristotelian terms, are fundamentally irrelevant to the question of salvation or damnation. Both virtue and vice depend on habit, but salvation and damnation do not."

The first example is a truly dramatic one. Near the base of the mountain are found those who had died under the ban of excommunication. This spiritual weapon, at times abused for political purposes, cannot prevent the human soul from turning to God and making due repentance *in articulo mortis*, as we learn from the lips of Manfred, Frederick II's illegitimate son, who, in 1259, had been subjected to the major form of excommunication and thus sentenced "with Judas the traitor into the fire and with the devil" (Morghen 1951, 329–30). Nevertheless, as Manfred tells us, not even this terrible anathema can prevent Eternal Love from rescuing the human soul from perdition "while hope has still any flower of green" (*Purg.* 3.133–35). Only God (and the *Comedy's* author) can know that Manfred is destined for heavenly beatitude, while his father is damned among the heretics (*Inf.* 10.119). Like the other souls found in antepurgatory, the excommunicated have to undergo a form of penal sentence: they are obliged to wait outside the gate of purgatory for a period thirty times greater than that of their exclusion from the life of the Church on earth. A similar punishment is meted out to those guilty of extreme negligence in various ways, but their waiting period is limited to the time they had spent on earth. Whereas the process of purification in purgatory proper is not a punishment but a purgation willingly undertaken by the souls (who are only too eager to cooperate with God's grace), in antepurgatory there is nothing the souls can do to help themselves—although their exile may be shortened by prayers offered up for them by the living (*Purg.*

3.142–45). While at first sight Belacqua seems still to be indulging in his habitual sin of sloth, he is in fact—ironically—quite right in stating that for him (and his companions in antepurgatory) it is pointless to strive to enter purgatory before the appointed time: “*andar in sù che porta? / ché non mi lascerebbe ire a’ martiri / l’angel di Dio che siede in su la porta*” (Purg. 4.127–29; What is the use of climbing? for God’s angel who is seated at the Gate [of Purgatory] would not let me proceed to the sufferings [inside]).

The “Law” of *Contrapasso* in Hell and Purgatory

Most Dante scholars identify the relationship whereby the suffering undergone (willingly, in purgatory) reflects the nature of the sin punished or purged as a *contrapasso* (but see the warning sounded in Armour 2000). The word itself—a hapax legomenon—is found in *Inferno* 28.142, when Bertran de Born, holding his severed head in his hand, exclaims: “Thus the *contrapasso* is observed in me.” A famous troubadour, Bertran is placed by Dante among the sowers of discord for encouraging Prince Henry to rebel against his father, Henry II of England. His punishment thus reflects the vivid force of metaphor in the medieval universe by illustrating the fact that he had been guilty of high treason against the “head” of state as well as of severing the ties that bound him to the “head” of his family.¹⁹ Dante’s *contrapasso* (counter-suffering) was borrowed from Scholastic translations of Aristotle. It implied “equal suffering repaid for a previous action” (*S. Th.* 2.2.61.4, resp.), while harking back to the biblical “an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Exod. 21.24–25), as well as the basic principle that “one is punished by the very things by which one sins” (Wisd. 11.16).²⁰

Contrapasso in Hell

Many of the examples of *contrapasso* in *Inferno* are simple and direct in their message: the lustful are tossed about in a tempest (as they had been by their passions), the gluttons wallow in mud and hail (reflecting their banquetings’ inevitable outcome of excrement and urine), hypocrites are encased in cloaks of burnished gold that is really lead, the basest of all metals. Other examples are more complex. The heretics are buried in tombs (*Inferno* 9–10): those who had denied that there was life beyond the grave have for all eternity what they had foreseen as humanity’s destiny—eternal encasement in a tomb. Moreover, their sepulchers are like furnaces, recalling the fire to which heretics were condemned on earth. The tombs are open for the present, but they will be sealed for all eternity after the Last Judgment, for the open tomb was an iconographic symbol of both the Resurrection and the Day of Judgment they had rejected. As we have seen, their divisive beliefs

and acts are punished by the fact that enemies on earth are now “united” as neighbors in the infernal tomb.

In *Inferno* 19.13–30, the simoniac popes are buried upside-down in the floor of hell, with flames licking the soles of the latest recruit's feet, which protrude from a shaft in the rock. The *contrapasso* is here at its most complex. Instead of turning their desires heavenward, these corrupt churchmen had sold the things of the Holy Spirit (just as Simon Magus had attempted to buy them from St. Peter: Acts 8.9–20): so, their heads are now pointing down toward Satan, imprisoned at the earth's center. Their feet are licked by flames, in an infernal parody of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of tongues “as though of fire” (*linguae tamquam ignis*) on the heads of the apostles (Acts 2.3–4). Everything here is turned upside-down: feet, instead of the noblest limb, the head; the infernal rock that imprisons them, instead of the Rock of Faith on which Christ founded his Church. Indeed, the whole scene reflects the fact that the lives and actions of these wretched churchmen had inverted God's moral order, which requires that the things of the Spirit be valued above all else.²¹ The sinner selected, Nicholas Orsini, had been pope during Dante's boyhood, reigning from 1277 to 1280. Like all supreme pontiffs, Nicholas III had declared himself to be the “heir of St. Peter,” thus establishing himself as St. Peter's direct successor “without intermediaries” (Ullmann 1975, 25). However, with supreme irony, he who had been St. Peter's successor is now damned as a follower of the *wrong* Simon—Simon Magus (Acts 8.9)—from whom the sin of simony took its name and whose name resounds as an ironic clarion call in the striking opening to the canto: *O Simon mago . . .* Christ's renaming of Simon was the most illustrious example of the belief that names should reflect the true nature and role of both persons and things (*VN* 13.4). Simon the fisherman's future role was emblazoned in the name “Peter” (Petrus) that Christ imposed on him with the words “You are rock [*Petrus*], and upon this rock [*petram*] I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16.18).

The Rock of Faith is thus indirectly evoked as a perpetual indictment of the first pope's corrupt successors, who are now encased upside-down in the infernal rock of the realm of Fraud. As Singleton (1965b) has shown, the apocryphal *Actus Petri cum Simone* relates that Simon Magus was cast down in midflight by God. This legend, together with bas-reliefs showing him hurtling down toward the earth and breaking his leg in the presence of Peter and Paul, may well have inspired the poet and led him to imagine the simoniac popes in that head-down position as an infernal parody of the apostolic succession. We may also be reminded of a vital element in Christian tradition, according to which St. Peter was granted his wish to be crucified upside-down.²² This act of supreme humility—Peter's belief that he was unworthy to be crucified

in the same position as Christ, the Founder of the Church—is parodied in the punishment of the evil popes who are now crucified in the bowels of the earth, from which had come the gold and silver they had adored.

Contrapasso in Purgatorio

Just as the moral order of *Purgatorio* is less complex than that of *Inferno*, so the relationship between the sufferings willingly undergone and the sin purged is apparently simpler—with an essential difference, that the sufferings in purgatory are undertaken by souls precisely in order to reform the vicious habits they had displayed while alive on earth.²³ The ex-proud are bent double under huge weights, in an attitude opposed to their “stiff necks” on earth (Exod. 32.9, 33.3; *Purg.* 11.52–54), an attitude that signals the crushing of their tendency to pride, the source of all sin and therefore ubiquitous in hell (Ecclus. 10.15). Umberto Aldobrandesco, Count of Santafiora, tells the pilgrim that it is because he did not practice humility among the living that he now has to bear the full weight of his former pride in order to eradicate the stains left by this vice in his soul while at the same time satisfying God’s justice (*Purg.* 11.70–72). In an autobiographical aside (*Purg.* 13.136–38) Dante confesses that he can already feel the weight of the rock that will bear him down on the first purgatorial terrace as a result of his earthly pride—a unique moment of self-accusation. The envious, clothed in hair-cloth, leaning on and supporting each other, have their eyelids sewn up with wire, a reminder of the fact that in life the spectacle of both the misfortunes and the successes of others had caused them to sin through envy. However, the full extent of the purgatorial *contrapasso* is far wider in scope, and the pattern is in fact a complex one, first traced by De’Negri (1958). Each terrace offers examples of the virtue opposed to the sin being purged (with an episode taken from the life of the Virgin as the first illustration of this virtue), together with examples of the sin punished. The scheme reveals Dante’s penchant for structural symmetry: examples of virtue / encounters with souls / examples of sin punished / angel citing an appropriate beatitude.²⁴

The most complex of these patterns is found on the terrace of Pride (*Purg.* 10–12), where the examples are carved into marble at the base of the mountainside (so that the proud, bent double, can meditate on them). Humility is illustrated by the Annunciation, accompanied by episodes taken from the lives of King David and the Emperor Trajan (an unusual trio: the mother of Christ; an ancestor of Christ; and a Roman emperor—the latter, an unexpected exemplar for the supreme Christian virtue of humility). The souls of the proud recite a modified form of the prayer *Our Father*, illustrating both their charity in praying for souls on earth and the fact that souls in

purgatory are incapable of being tempted to sin (*Purg.* 11.19–24): “Do not test our strength, so easily subdued, against the ancient adversary, but set it free from him [the devil] who so goads it [to evil]. This last prayer, dear Lord, we do not make for ourselves—for there is no need—but for those who have stayed behind [on earth].” There follows a series of thirteen examples of pride punished, in scenes the souls contemplate carved in the rock beneath their feet (*Purg.* 12.14–63). The first (ll. 25–27) displays Lucifer’s precipitous fall from heaven, paralleled in the second scene by Briareus (ll. 28–30), struck down by Jove’s thunderbolt for taking part in the giants’ revolt against the gods. The pair provides a good example of Dante’s syncretism; rather than rejecting Greco-Roman mythology as entirely false, he credits it with a kernel of truth (cf. *Conv.* 2.4.6–7). The sculpted examples continue, alternating between Old Testament history and classical mythology, for thirty-six verses or twelve ternary units, in which four groups of three *terzine* begin with the letters V then O then M (VOM = MAN), an acrostic repeated in lines 61–63, which portray proud Troy reduced to ashes. The first four *terzine* show humankind’s rebellion against the divinity; the next four, human pride; the last group, the pride of tyrants. The symmetrical ordering, dear to medieval aesthetics, is overarched as in a musical phrase by the acrostic VOM, reminding the reader that humanity’s original sin was one of pride, when Adam and Eve succumbed to the Tempter’s promise, “You shall be like gods” (Gen. 3–5; *Par.* 26.115–17). At the end of the terrace, an angel pronounces the beatitude “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (*Purg.* 12.110; Matt. 5.3). The pilgrim suddenly realizes that one of the seven *Ps*—(each *P* signifying *peccatum*, “sin”) imprinted on his brow by the angel at the entrance and symbolizing the effects of the seven capital vices—has been removed. This pattern is repeated after the pilgrim has traversed the other six terraces, until finally in the Earthly Paradise, all memory of sin is removed by the waters of the River Lethe while memory of everything good is restored by the waters of Eunoè (*Purg.* 28.127–30; 33.91–96).

The Moral Order of *Paradiso*

The moral order of paradise is exemplified by the method invented to indicate the varying degrees of beatitude enjoyed by the souls in heaven. As Beatrice tells Dante in *Paradiso* 4.28–48, all the blessed are united with God in the Empyrean Heaven, outside the created universe. Nevertheless, true to the Scholastic axiom that there is nothing in the intellect that was not first present in the senses (*nihil in intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu*), Dante avoids one of the weaknesses of modern theology, its attempt to approach God and spiritual matters mainly through abstractions. Instead, the poet resolutely asserts the need to make allowances for the limitations

of the human intellect, which are catered to by Holy Scripture when it attributes “feet and hands to God but means something else” (ll. 44–45) or when angels are portrayed with human features, bodies, and wings. Hence, the blessed spirits will appear to the pilgrim as though they inhabited the various spheres, although all of them in fact “adorn the first sphere” (l. 34). In other words, the pilgrim and we, as readers, are informed that virtually the whole of what is described in most of *Paradiso* is pure allegory or an extended metaphor. What appears to the pilgrim and is narrated by the poet from canto 1 to canto 30 is not to be taken as literally true about paradise, whose reality must in every sense be sought at a higher level.

This ladder of vision, blessedness, and desire constitutes the dramatic nucleus of Dante’s *Paradiso*, an ascent marked by a constant increase in light and beauty (especially in Beatrice’s radiant splendor).²⁵ As so often, the poet seizes upon an aspect of medieval science in order to drive home his moral lesson. It was believed that the earth cast its shadow as far as the third heaven, the planet Venus (*Par.* 9.118–19). Dante the narrator uses this aspect of the physical universe to underscore the lowest degrees of blessedness enjoyed by the souls who appear in the first three spheres and to indicate the fact that their merits on earth had been limited in various ways. The souls that appear to Dante in the lowest sphere, that of the moon, are those of two women, Piccarda Donati and the Empress Costanza, whose families span the three realms of the afterlife: Piccarda’s brother Corso is destined for hell, where—as we have noted—Costanza’s son, Frederick II, already resides among the heretics; Piccarda’s other brother, Forese, is on the terrace of Gluttony in purgatory, while Costanza’s grandson Manfred is in antepurgatory. Both women had entered convents and dedicated their virginity to God; both, however, had been forced to leave the cloister and marry—although Piccarda now asserts that Costanza in her heart had remained faithful to her vows (*Par.* 3.115–17). This leads Beatrice to explain that a distinction must be made between Costanza’s absolute will and her relative will. Like most Christians—and unlike St. Lawrence and Mucius Scaevola (a pagan hero of ancient Rome!)—Costanza and Piccarda had been swayed by force and the machinations of evil men (*Par.* 4.73–114). While Costanza’s absolute will remained faithful to God, her relative will was to some extent defective and gave in to threats of violence.

The moon was traditionally associated with mutation and instability.²⁶ The souls’ relative moral imperfection is also reflected in the moon’s appearance, the fact that spots appear on its bright surface. The whole light metaphysics of the *Comedy* is present *in nuce* in Beatrice’s lecture (*Par.* 2.61–148), as she refutes Dante’s previous “Averroistic” explanation of the reason why spots appear on the moon (*Conv.* 2.13.9), which had been based on a physical

hypothesis about the planet's varying density.²⁷ Here, through Beatrice, the poet gives us a metaphysical explanation of Neoplatonic origin (cf. Aquinas, *De coelo* 2. 16). In the heavens, the happiness of the angelic orders is united with the spheres they cause to move.²⁸ Hence, it is both the moon's distance from the highest heaven, the Primum Mobile, and the fact that its movers are the lowest order of angels that explain the spots on the moon's surface, since the radiance of all the heavenly spheres is a visible manifestation of "the happy nature from which it originates, [for] the mixed power shines through the body as happiness does through the pupil of a sparkling eye" (*Par.* 2.142–44).²⁹

In similar fashion, the souls that appear to the pilgrim in Mercury (moved by archangels) accomplished great things on earth, but they did so primarily in order to acquire honor and fame; in desiring glory, they loved the true good with less intensity (*Par.* 6.115–17). The third heaven or sphere, Venus, at a mean distance of some 2 million miles from the earth, is moved by the Principalities (*Par.* 8.34, although Dante had attributed its motion to the Thrones in *Conv.* 2.5.13).³⁰ Venus is the obvious setting for those who had been famous lovers on earth—a motley crew that includes a member of the French Angevin dynasty, Charles Martel (whom the poet had met in Florence in 1294); Cunizza da Romano, the lover of the Italian troubadour Sordello, who ended her days in Florence, in the house of Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti; Folquet, another troubadour, who became bishop of Toulouse in 1205 and took part in the persecution of Albigensian heretics; and the Old Testament harlot Rahab, who—an ancestress of Christ (Matt. 1.5; James 2.25) and a prototype of Mary Magdalene—came to be regarded as a *figura* of the Church.³¹ Cunizza stresses the fact that although it may be difficult for many on earth to understand the positive reality of Venus's influence, she rejoices in it, for, as Folquet explains, "We do not repent here, but we laugh, not for the guilt, which no longer comes to mind" but for God's providential design, the divine alchemy capable of turning the mud of human passion into spiritual gold (*Par.* 9.103–8). Another doubt regarding the moral order of paradise is resolved by Piccarda and then by Justinian: the former explains that the blessed souls who appear to the pilgrim in the lower spheres *cannot* desire a greater degree of beatitude, because they totally accept God's will (*Par.* 3.70–87); the latter asserts that part of the souls' beatitude springs from their awareness of the perfect equivalence between their deserts on earth and their reward in heaven (*Par.* 6.118–26). Significantly, the poet of the *Comedy* sides with St. Thomas (against the Franciscan primacy of love) in claiming that both for angels and for humans heavenly beatitude consists in *vision*: "From this it can be seen [*veder*] that beatitude is based on the act of see-ing [*vede*], not on the act of love, which then follows" (*Par.* 28.109–11).³²

Like *Inferno* 9–10 and *Purgatorio* 10, the tenth canto of *Paradiso* marks an essential transition from one moral category to another. The narrative contrast could not be greater. From the fierce invective against the corruption of the Church on earth (*Par.* 9.127–42), where the she-wolf of greed has transformed the shepherd into a wolf, the poet invites his readers to contemplate the most profound mystery of the Christian faith, the belief in a triune God, and to admire the skill displayed by the Holy Trinity in the creation of the heavens with their perfect order and dual motion (*Par.* 10.1–21). Now, above the earth's shadow, the two space-travelers rise up through the spheres in which the pilgrim sees the souls of those who had cooperated fully with the influences of God's heavens. No trace of moral imperfection remains.

The fourth sphere, that of the Sun (moved by the Powers), reveals twenty-four spirits who had sought and practiced wisdom on earth and whose heavenly brilliance is even greater than the sun's (*Par.* 10.40–42)—a physical impossibility that emphasizes the supernatural order of these celestial regions. The souls' search for the truth on earth is now complemented by their achievement of harmony in paradise, a harmony visible in their symmetrical ordering into three circles—with two circles of twelve spirits named (reflecting the cosmic order manifest in the zodiac)—as well as in their heavenly chanting and their unified circular motion. St. Thomas not only praises the founder of the Franciscan Order, but he also introduces his terrestrial adversary, Siger of Brabant, as one who had taught "truths" that had earned him hatred and hostility on earth (*Par.* 11.40–117; 10.133–38). Similarly, St. Bonaventure praises St. Dominic and attributes to Joachim of Fiore the gift of prophecy he had denied him in life (*Par.* 12.46–141).³³ The Dominican's praise of Francis and the Franciscan's praise of Dominic constitute further examples of ideal heavenly harmony, as opposed to the discord on earth.

The souls of the wise naturally include those of theologians, such as Albert the Great (d. 1280), St. Thomas's teacher, whose influence on Dante was far-reaching.³⁴ They even include the only contemporary pope "canonized" by the poet, although no mention is made of his elevation to the papacy as John XXI (pope, 1276–77): he is merely "Peter of Spain, who shines down there in twelve books," those of his popular manual of logic or *Summulae logicales* (*Par.* 12.134–35). More surprising for the modern reader is the fact that the soul that shines brightest of all in the first circle—brighter than Aquinas himself (*Par.* 10.109)—is that of Solomon. St. Thomas hastens to assure the pilgrim that Solomon received from God "such deep wisdom . . . that, if truth be true, no second [man] ever rose to see so much" (ll. 112–14). In *Paradiso* 13.37–111, Aquinas explains to Dante in what way Solomon was unique. When God offered to give him whatever he requested, Solomon asked for "kingly prudence" (13.104). God therefore granted him a "wise and discerning

mind," so that "no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you" (3 Kings 3.12). This explains Solomon's relative perfection as the exemplar of kingship, his supreme ability to govern his people by following the dictates of justice and wisdom. The moral superiority attributed to Solomon in the first circle of the wise is testimony both to Dante's belief in the sacred autonomy of the civil power and to his conviction that authorities are competent only if each remains in its proper sphere.³⁵

The spectacle witnessed by the pilgrim in the fourth heaven is brought to a close by a hymn in praise of the Holy Trinity, repeated three times by the twenty-four spirits (*Par.* 14.28–33; cf. 13.25–27).³⁶ This is followed by the appearance of a third group of heavenly spirits and a reference to the Holy Spirit (Love), even as the opening reference to the Trinity (*Par.* 10.1–6) praised the order imposed on Creation by the Father, while the entire heaven of the wise is placed under the aegis of the Son, who is both "Supreme Wisdom" (*Inf.* 3.6) and the Sun of Justice, *Sol justitiae*, Christ's prophetic title (*Mal.* 4.2).

The fifth heaven—that of Mars, the pagan god of war and first patron of Florence (*Inf.* 13.143–45)—occupies a central position among the nine spheres or heavens of the created cosmos. Its moral significance is based on the cardinal virtue of fortitude, displayed by the angelic Virtues (who imitate the strength and fortitude of the Godhead), as well as by the warrior saints who appear in a great cross of brilliant lights, and lastly by the pilgrim himself. The latter receives from his great-great-grandfather Cacciaguida—who died c. 1147 wearing the sign of the cross during the Second Crusade—the news that he will be driven into exile and forced to leave behind everything he holds most dear (*Par.* 17.46–60), moreover that he must reveal to the world everything that has been disclosed to him, however unpleasant the consequences for others and even for himself (ll. 124–42). Here, at long last, the pilgrim receives the answer to the question he had posed at the very beginning (*Inf.* 2.13–36): Why should Dante Alighieri—neither Aeneas, the ancestor of Rome, nor St. Paul, apostle to the gentiles—undertake a journey through the other world? God's plan for him is now revealed. The message he must take back to a world gone astray will be bitter at first; nevertheless, it will provide vital moral nourishment when digested (*Par.* 17.127–32). Beatrice's command to write down what he has seen "for the good of the world that lives badly" (*Purg.* 32.103–5) is here reformulated in the most solemn manner by a blessed spirit able to read the decrees of Divine Providence (*Par.* 17.43–45). Unlike the ambiguous oracles of old, the Christian martyr Cacciaguida shows Dante how the pilgrim-author's epic *imitatio Christi* requires him to take up his cross and bear faithful witness to God's truth with supreme fortitude, even unto death (Schnapp 1986).

In the sixth sphere—that of Jupiter—the pilgrim encounters a multitude of spirits who had loved and practiced justice to the highest degree on earth. After forming the thirty-five letters of the divine command to earthly rulers and judges found in the opening of (Solomon's) Book of Wisdom, "Love justice, you who judge the earth," their brilliant lights fashion an eagle (*Par.* 6.4: "God's bird"). The eye and eyebrow of the eagle are composed of six lights (*lumi*) or spirits. Not surprisingly, perhaps, David—Christ's regal ancestor and author of the Book of Psalms—forms the pupil of the eagle's eye. As Beatrice observes (*Par.* 20.67–69), what is astonishing, however, is the fact that in this august company (David and Hezekiah; emperors Trajan and Constantine; with a solitary "modern" ruler, William II of Sicily) we find Ripheus, an obscure Trojan mentioned some three times in the second book of the *Aeneid*. In this salutary shock to his readers' expectations, our poet claims that a pagan renowned for his love of justice in Trojan antiquity (*Aen.* 2.426–27) had received baptism by desire and had practiced the three theological virtues in ancient Troy.³⁷ Vergil's pessimistic account of the way the pagan gods had allowed Ripheus, the greatest lover of justice among the Trojans, to be slaughtered is now corrected by Dante's boast that, however incredible it may appear to the world below, the Christian God so loves justice that he granted an eternal reward to Ripheus (cf. Acts 10.35: "in every nation, anyone who fears Him [God] and practices justice is acceptable to Him"). In its opposition to greed and its encouragement of the supreme virtue of charity, justice is the most "human" of virtues (*Conv.* 1.12.9). Equally noteworthy is its link with the empire, which is symbolized by the eagle in Justinian's discourse (*Par.* 6) and here in the symbiotic relationship Justice–empire, for justice is most effective when administered by the universal emperor (*Mon.* 1.11.8).

Now, Dante and his guide rise up to Saturn, the seventh sphere and highest of the "heavens," which acts as a bridge between earthly activity and the things of God and eternity. It is understandably the place where the pilgrim sees the souls of those who had dedicated their lives to contemplation, the highest form of human "activity" on earth. To mark the change, the "sweet symphony of paradise" is silent (*Par.* 21.58–59), not only because at this level it would overwhelm the pilgrim's senses but also because its silence evokes that of the cloisters, which once provided such a rich harvest for paradise, although nowadays virtually no one ascends to paradise (*Par.* 22.73–78).

The message of monastic corruption is broadcast by St. Benedict (d. 543), founder and creator of Western monasticism as a cenobitic institution governed by a Rule that reflected the Roman concern for order and stability, at a time when the emperor Justinian was accomplishing his "lofty work" of codifying Roman laws (*Par.* 6.10–24).³⁸ Benedict is in fact preceded in Dante's account by another Benedictine, St. Peter Damian, born in Ravenna

(c. 1007) some three hundred years before the exiled poet wrote the final cantos of his *Paradiso* in that same city. A reluctant cardinal and a dedicated Church reformer before returning to the cloister where he lived out the last seven years of his life, Peter Damian upbraids the modern princes of the Church for their luxury and ostentation, which are utterly opposed to the example set by St. Peter and St. Paul (*Par.* 21.127–35).

To understand the tragic force of Dante's denunciation of the greed and corruption of the monastic orders, we must remember that the ideal expressed by St. Bernard and shared by so many in the Middle Ages had led to the belief that the monastic way of life gave its practitioners a head start in the race to salvation, so much so that they were known as "the religious" (*virī religiosi*), "in contrast to all other men whether secular or clerical."³⁹ However much men and women came to value an active life in this world, withdrawal from it for the sake of contemplating the things of heaven continued to exert its fascination as an ideal. Even Dante—the true son of a flourishing Italian commune, convinced as he was of the importance of being a "citizen" (*Par.* 8.115–17)—believed that the contemplative life was superior to the active life, as the exalted station of the contemplative spirits in the seventh heaven demonstrates. Already in *Convivio* 4.22.17, he had claimed that "contemplation is more replete with spiritual light than anything else existing down here on earth"—an estimate borne out by the fact that the pilgrim's eyes cannot behold Beatrice in her overwhelming beauty and splendor at this stage in his ascent (*Par.* 21.7–9).

As another of Benedict's spiritual sons, St. Bernard (chosen by Dante as his intercessor with the Virgin Queen of Heaven) wrote, "The contemplative life . . . consists in renouncing the world and in delighting in living for God alone" (Gardner 1972, 172). This ideal is vividly illustrated by the golden ladder that links Saturn with the Empyrean: it is the ladder seen in a dream by Jacob that reached up to heaven, with God's messengers descending and ascending (Gen. 28.12). St. Peter Damian described the ladder in one of his letters as a symbol of the Way of Contemplation, "the golden way that leads men back to their homeland (*ad patriam*)" (*PL* 145.248). Through it, humanity receives help from God in order to rise up to him spiritually and intellectually while on this earth, for "we descend by self-exaltation and ascend by humility."⁴⁰

Beatrice's gaze is sufficient to impel Dante up the ladder to the Heaven of the Fixed Stars (Di Fonzo 1991), entering the eighth heavenly sphere in the constellation of the Gemini, under which the poet was born and to which he gives thanks for his intellectual and poetical powers (*Par.* 22.112–20).⁴¹ This stage in the ascent completes Dante's presentation of the moral order of heaven (those who had made unstable vows; those who did what is right

chiefly for honor and fame; the lovers; the wise; the warriors; the just; those who had given themselves up to a life of contemplation). However, as we have already noted, the scenes witnessed by the pilgrim during his ascent are a kind of phantasmagoria orchestrated especially for him (and, of course, his readers), in order to illustrate graphically a hierarchy of categories or groups. In fact, as Cogan (1999, 220–22) argues, “The degrees of blessedness revealed to Dante during his journey do not correspond to any human estimation of the relative value of actions of the sorts represented by the souls in the different spheres. . . . The value of any and of all actions . . . comes from their participation in a universe of action that in its totality and form reflects the divine nature.”

A different kind of moral order is, however, observable in the *reality* of the celestial rose, once the pilgrim is finally able to contemplate “both the courts of heaven made manifest” (*Par.* 30.96). In the court of heaven as described in *Paradiso* 32, it is the individual’s historic role and merit that reign supreme: Eve, the universal mother, is found directly below Mary, the mother of God; St. Peter (certainly no contemplative!) is seated next to Mary (Adam is nearest to her, on her left [*Par.* 32.118–26]), with the founders of three religious orders—Francis, Benedict, and Augustine—beneath John the Baptist (Florence’s patron saint, seated next to St. Peter: ll. 31–35).⁴² Schnapp (1991b, 214) points to the fascinating exception created by Beatrice, “who alone is seated in the same groupings of souls as a man,” which “places her alongside Rachel, the symbol of the contemplative life, while at the same time identifying her with the authority of Christ and the Church, both vested in Peter.”

The Poet’s Personal Evaluation of Sins

Although as readers of the poem we are apt to be mesmerized by its author’s skill in creating the illusion of an objective system of reward and punishment, we should not forget that the *Comedy* is grounded in Dante’s psychological makeup and his vision of life, both clearly conditioned by his personal experience. As already noted, at its very beginning (*Inf.* 3), the pilgrim’s journey into the afterlife takes him to a place of the poet’s own invention: a state, neither heaven nor hell, in which, suspended for all eternity, he finds the cowards who refused to make a choice, and therefore mingle with the angels “who did not rebel, nor were they faithful to God, but were for themselves” (*Inf.* 3.38–39)—a conception of angelic neutrality quite opposed to Aquinas’s angelology, but illustrative of the poet’s contempt for a lack of *energeia* in all creatures. Life, for Dante, consisted above all in making an existential choice. Even more surprising than the location assigned to them is the *contrapasso* these sitters-on-the-fence are forced to

endure, which surely strikes the reader as unpleasant as any invented for the damned souls in hell. Vainly running naked behind a banner, they are stung by insects and forced to shed their blood and tears, which they had carefully spared on earth but which are now devoured at their feet by loathsome worms (*Inf.* 3.52–69).

There follows an equally idiosyncratic presentation of the souls in limbo. Although it is the first circle of hell, Dante's limbo is quite extraordinary in a number of ways. In Latin theology, there were two categories: the *limbus patrum*, in which those who were destined for salvation but lived before Christ had to wait until the work of Redemption was fulfilled (as Virgil recounts in *Inf.* 4.52–63); and the *limbus infantium*, which received the souls of unbaptized infants. After Christ's harrowing of hell, only the latter continued to exist: a state of natural felicity deprived of the vision of God, hence without any form of beatitude.⁴³ Dante, however, virtually ignores the unbaptized infants, in order to concentrate on another category of unbaptized souls, the heroes and heroines of human thought and achievement. Indeed, his admiration for the "great spirits" (*Inf.* 4.119) who did not know Christ led him to reject the Catholic tradition which denied the possibility that there could have been virtuous pagans not saved by God's grace. In that tradition, faith is essential if actions are to be pleasing to God, but those destined for salvation who lived and died before Christ (the prophets and virtuous Jews of the Old Testament) were saved by a special dispensation of grace. Early commentators on the poem are clearly embarrassed by the presence of adult pagans in limbo; and their embarrassment turns to near-panic when they come to the noble castle (*Inf.* 4.106ff.), with its seven walls and gates, shady lawns, and sunny open spaces where ancient philosophers and poets indulge in intellectual conversation. Although some of the details are controversial, it is clear that the extraordinary presence of light in the first circle of hell reflects the truth that had been glimpsed in part by the souls during their time on earth. This is in clear violation of the law ordaining the darkness of hell, the "blind world" as it is defined in that same canto (*Inf.* 4.13). An even greater shock to the orthodox is the presence here of the two most influential Arab philosophers, Avicenna and Averroës, notorious for their dangerous teachings based on Aristotelian doctrine, and Saladin, founder of the Ayubite dynasty, who recaptured Jerusalem from the crusaders in 1187.

Readers nowadays may be delighted to discover such "modern" broad-mindedness, although they would do well to venture cautiously down this track. The preferential treatment accorded to such pagans as Homer, Aristotle, Plato, Aeneas, and Julius Caesar, as well as to the followers of Islam mentioned above, is a direct result of two essential aspects of Dante's thought. The first is his fascination with magnanimity, the hallmark of the elite according

to Aristotle's *Ethics* (Forti 1977; Scott 1977). The memory of these outstanding men and women still thrills the Christian poet (*Inf.* 4.119–20). The other is Dante's desire to exalt the founders of the empire and the wisdom of pagan antiquity on which its authority rested in the purely human sphere. The presence of Avicenna and Averroës reinforces the point that philosophy must be independent of theology, just as the empire must be independent of the papacy in temporal matters—a point made even more forcefully in *Paradiso* 10.133–38, where (as we have already mentioned) the poet places the radical Aristotelian philosopher Siger of Brabant among the saints who had cultivated wisdom on earth.

In this Christianized version of Virgil's Elysian Fields, Dante may appear to come dangerously close to the Pelagian heresy, which asserted that worthy pagans had been saved through their own efforts. Augustine had denounced this view as the height of folly, declaring that without God's gift of grace, it was impossible for human nature to avoid mortal sin and damnation; and St. Antonino (1389–1459), bishop of Florence, was to reject Dante's limbo as inconsistent with Catholic teaching. Nevertheless, while it is important to realize that Dante's Christian beliefs were not held blindly, and that on the question of limbo (as on one or two other points of doctrine) he enjoyed what may be called a certain "pre-Reformation license," it is just as important to remember that the *Comedy* as a whole demonstrates quite clearly that its author was a faithful upholder of the essentials of Christian dogma as interpreted in his times. As far as limbo and its privileged pagans are concerned, we must remember that Dante was a Christian poet for whom hell was a terrible reality; and the inhabitants of limbo *are in hell*. Despite the noble castle and their *locus amoenus*, the souls "without hope live in desire" (*Inf.* 4.42), as Virgil tells his charge. In other words, condemned to an eternity of frustration, they are deprived of that union with God for which, like all souls, they were created.⁴⁴ The tragedy of eternal damnation incurred by the virtuous heathen is one that continues to haunt the pilgrim right up to the Heaven of Justice, even as it—by his own admission—haunted the man Dante through so much of his lifetime (*Par.* 19.32–33, 67–90).

As Moore noted over a century ago (1899, 210), the attitudes and emotions evinced by the *Comedy's* creator and protagonist do not always reflect the supposed gravity of the sin. This may be seen in various ways. The punishment devised for the gluttons (*Inf.* 6.7–12: they are immersed in a stinking quagmire and battered by "the eternal, cursed, cold, and heavy rain") is so reminiscent of feces and urine that it is described by the pilgrim as "the most disgusting" imaginable (*Inf.* 6.48). Even more surprising is the behavior of both Dante and Virgil in the circle of wrath, when, far from feeling any kind of compassion for a sinner (as with Francesca and Ciacco), the pilgrim spurns,

with extraordinary anger, a sinner who identifies himself simply as "one who weeps" (*Inf.* 8.36), retorting: "With weeping and mourning, accursed spirit, now remain; for I recognize you, although you are filthy all over" (ll. 37–39). It is as though the pilgrim were infected with the sin punished in this circle: his reaction, like his language, is surprisingly extreme. Yet, after pushing the sinner back "with the other dogs," Virgil applauds this outburst of anger with a biblical echo, "Disdainful spirit, blessed is she that bore you!" (*Inf.* 8.44–45; cf. Luke 1.28, 48), and commends his desire to see the sinner "doused in this broth."

Critics have accused the poet of ferocity, vindictiveness, and implacable hatred, although it seems unlikely that the poet would wittingly have portrayed himself as nourishing these un-Christian sentiments. Instead, we must take into account the fact that the pilgrim has to learn that pity for the damned is an offense against God's justice (*Inf.* 20.27–30); and, much later in hell, he delights in tricking a traitor (*Inf.* 33.148–50). But at this point in the journey it would seem appropriate to recall that anger is viewed in contrary ways in the Christian tradition. Righteous anger is necessarily controlled by reason: Christ's anger at those who had turned the House of God into a den of thieves was not a vice but "zeal for the Lord's house," an action undertaken for justice's sake.⁴⁵ The sinner against whom Dante vents his anger is a fellow-Florentine, Filippo dei Cavicciuli, a Black Guelf and a member of the insolent Adimari family (*Par.* 16.115–18; Boccaccio, *Decameron* 9.8), known as "Filippo Argenti" because of his ostentatious prodigality in shoeing his horse with silver. In his arrogance and insolent display of wealth, Filippo Argenti is judged to be symptomatic of the corruption that has overtaken contemporary Florence, as opposed to the frugality of the Florentines of earlier times when the city was "at peace, sober and modest" (*Par.* 15.99). It is the decadence of his native city, inspired by "pride, envy and avarice" (*Inf.* 6.74; 15.68), that kindles Dante's anger. Finally, we may note a moral crescendo as the expression of anger moves from Dante to Virgil (*Inf.* 8.121), and then to the righteous or divine anger displayed by the heavenly messenger who opens the gates of the Devil's City (*Inf.* 9.33, 76–99).

The opposite reaction is found in *Inferno* 16.7–90, where Dante (both author and protagonist) treats the homosexual Florentines who have sinned against Nature, God's daughter, "with greater respect than any other infernal figures except those in Limbo" (Hollander 1997). Virgil not only tells his charge that he must show respect and courtesy to these sinners, he even adds that, if it were not for the rain of fire that beats down on them, it would be more fitting for Dante to run to greet his fellow-citizens than to wait for them to come to him (*Inf.* 16.16–18). Two of these sinners, Iacopo Rusticucci and Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, had already been singled out by the pilgrim and

praised for their good actions in *Inferno* 6.79–81 (although in asking Ciacco about their fate he had revealed his ignorance of God's judgment on these and other great Florentines). In canto 16, however, the pilgrim confronts that judgment when he encounters their spirits, yet he continues to feel reverence and even affection for them—so much so that he is tempted to embrace them (an action that, he feels sure, would have won Virgil's approval [*Inf.* 16.46–51]). Nowhere else in the *Comedy* do the poet, the pilgrim, and his guide so hate the sin and so love the sinner!

As a final observation on Dante's personal reaction to the sins so vividly portrayed in his *Comedy*, we should note the scorn heaped on usurers in *Inferno* 17.43–75, while bearing in mind the likelihood that the poet's father was a moneylender.⁴⁶ These sinners are ironically represented with their professional moneybags hanging from their necks, pouches which furnish an infernal parody of the nobility debased by usury, for on each is imprinted a bestial version of the coat of arms of the family to which they belonged. Nowhere else perhaps does the poet show such contempt as here, where Reginaldo degli Scrovegni, identified by a coat of arms bearing a pregnant blue sow, "twisted his mouth and stuck out his tongue, like an ox licking its snout" (*Inf.* 17.74–75). This grotesque scene anticipates the moment in purgatory when the pilgrim is clearly relieved to discover that Statius was not guilty of avarice, but of prodigality—"a sin far more becoming to a poet (*Purg.* 22.19–42).⁴⁷

NOTES

1. *Inf.* 11.79–84 refers to *three* "dispositions" condemned by God's justice: incontinence, malice, and "mad bestiality." Although some understand the latter term to refer to the sins of violence (with the bestial Minotaur as their guardian), Mazzoni (1972, 219–20) identifies it with those of the treachery or fraud complex. More recently, Cogan (1999, 12) has argued that Dante has taken the term *malizia*, "which in Aristotle refers to vice generally," and restricted it "to one specific sort of vice, injustice." As Hollander (2001, 114) observes, "What was intended by Dante as a clear representation of the moral order of the sins of *Inferno* has become the cause for an endless squabble among those who deal with the question." Instead, Barański (2000a, 137) claims that Virgil is incapable of reconciling the differing definitions of *malitia* given by Aristotle and Cicero, thus displaying the limitations of his pagan intellect; indeed, "Piuttosto che chiarire l'organizzazione dell'*Inferno*, Virgilio mette in evidenza la propria limitatezza intellettuale, culturale e religiosa" (140).

2. Barolini (2000, 86) highlights this coupling as an "anomalous feature of Dante's eschatological scheme that reflects his commitment to contaminating theological culture with classical culture . . . [B]oth the fourth circle of hell and the fifth terrace of purgatory are devoted to avarice *and* prodigality, despite there being no official or for that matter unofficial Church doctrine in support of such an idea." Moreover, Barolini suggests that "the golden mean is captivating to Dante because it signifies for him the ethical ground where Aristotle and Augustine meet. . . . At

the foundation of Dante's theology of hell is a theory of human desire that is laid out by Aristotle, parsed by Aquinas, but arguably for Dante most spiritually attuned to Augustine" (102). On a lighter note, Gorni (1995b, 109) speaks of Dante's hell, with its orderly, rational circles and subdivisions as "a kind of Warburg Institute of mortal sin."

3. Cogan (1999, 62) points out that Dante's two categories of heresy—Epicureanism (denial of the soul's immortality) and Photinism (denial of Christ's divine nature)—do not include contemporary heretical movements, such as Catharism; in fact, Dante's selection is "extraordinarily narrow."

4. For an extensive examination of this opposition, see Ferrante 1995.

5. This essential truth is most convincingly illustrated by Ferrante (1984). Cogan (1999) claims that the same ethical criteria are observed throughout the *Comedy*: sins of the will are the worst (fraud, in *Inf.*; in *Purg.*, pride and envy), followed by sins of the irascible appetite (violence, in *Inf.*; in *Purg.*, anger and sloth); sins of the concupiscible appetite are lowest in the scale, because of the sway of passion (incontinence, in *Inf.*; in *Purg.*, avarice, gluttony, and lust). Cogan applies the same moral grid to *Paradiso*: the first three groups of souls that appear to Dante in *Paradiso*, who enjoy the lowest degrees of beatitude, all suffered from some defect of the will; the irascible appetite governed the actions of those souls who appear in the fourth, fifth, and sixth spheres; the concupiscible appetite (love) ruled the actions of souls appearing in the seventh and eighth spheres; the ninth sphere reveals "a simple and immediate love of God . . . of which only angels are truly capable" (217).

6. This same image was taken up by Machiavelli in a famous section (chap. 18) of *The Prince*.

7. As Barolini (1990b, 337) points out, "Dante is here troping his master fiction: instead of 'living' dead people, we now must contend with the idea of dead living people."

8. The "theologically perverse" idea (that a human creature can be condemned to hell *before* death, thus negating the hope or possibility of conversion) may well have been suggested by John's dramatic account of the Last Supper: "After he [Judas] received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him" (John 13.27. cf. Luke 22.3).

9. The fact that Guido da Montefeltro's spectacular conversion is praised in *Conv.* 4.28.8 and nullified in *Inf.* 27.79–129 may be due to Dante's having acquired some new information (possibly from Riccobaldo da Ferrara's *Historiae*) regarding Guido's last years on earth. However, it is just as likely that Dante, the world judge of the *Comedy*, decided to offer his readers a spectacular example of the corruption of souls and their eventual damnation for which Boniface was responsible. The pope should have acted as Guido's spiritual father and encouraged him in his quest for salvation. Guido's initial reluctance to advise Boniface concerning the use of fraud in the pope's fratricidal "crusade" against the Colonna is finally overcome by the supreme pontiff's reminder (*Inf.* 27.103–4): "I can open and shut heaven, as you know; hence, there are two keys which my predecessor did not value." The two keys are of course a traditional symbol of papal supremacy, harking back to Matthew 16.19, while the claim that the pope is able to open and shut the gates of heaven is based on Christ's words to Peter: "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall also be loosed in heaven." As we have seen in chapter 5, Dante attacks the all-embracing interpretation of "whatever" (*quodcumque*) in *Mon.* 3.8.7 (see above, chap. 5, "Biblical Precedents"). Guido da Montefeltro's tragedy is an

ironic example of this authority abused, as in the closing phrase of Boniface's bull, *Unam Sanctam*: "We declare, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff." By submitting to Boniface's wiles, Guido damned himself for all eternity, since he could not repent of the sin before committing it, and therefore could not receive valid absolution, as a diabolical logician gleefully points out in *Inf.* 27.119–20 (thus contradicting Dante's assertion in *Conv.* 3.13.2 that devils cannot philosophize!). Too many critics assert, without proof, that Guido's first conversion (when he made his peace with the Church and became a Franciscan) was insincere. On the other hand, the tragic irony in his damnation—the trickster tricked himself—is far greater if, as Dante stated (*Conv.* 4.28.8), Guido had honestly attempted to make his peace with God when he joined the Order of Friars Minor in 1296.

10. As I pointed out many years ago (Scott 1970, 470–71; cf. Scott 1977, 94–95), the *attacco* or opening of *Inf.* 19 signals a radical departure in the poet's narrative strategy. Whereas in previous cantos the poet-narrator had concentrated on diegetic elements (e.g., *Inf.* 10.1–3: *Ora sen va . . .*; 18.1–9: *Luogo è in inferno detto Malebolge . . .*), here—for the first time—the nature of the sin is revealed and condemned in the opening *terzine*: "O Simon Magus! o wretched followers who prostitute for gold and silver the things of God, which should be brides of goodness; now, let the trump sound for you who are in the third pouch." See also Blasucci 2000, 380: "un caso a sé è rappresentato dall'esordio al canto XIX."

11. *Folle* is used by Dante to indicate an attitude or an emotion that oversteps certain essential limits imposed on humankind. Its emblematic use is found in the description by Ulysses of his fateful voyage as a *folle volo* or "mad flight," in *Inf.* 26.125 (cf. *Par.* 27.82–83). At the outset, Dante the pilgrim is fearful that his own journey may turn out to be *folle* (*Inf.* 2.35) and thus lead to disaster. For a comparable emotional charge, reminiscent of the prophets of the Old Testament, see, e.g., *Par.* 18.115–36 and *Par.* 27. 19–66 (St. Peter's denunciation of his unworthy successors).

12. Quoted in Le Goff 1984, 285, from an appendix to the Second Council of Lyons's constitution *Cum sacrosancta*, promulgated in November 1274. The "birth certificate of Purgatory as a doctrinally defined place" is a letter from Innocent IV to his legate to the Greeks, written just before the pontiff's death and sent on March 6, 1254 (Le Goff 1984, 283–84). As Le Goff notes, "To move from binary [hell/paradise] to tertiary [hell/purgatory/paradise] schemes was to cross a dividing line in the organization of social thought, a step the importance of which Claude Lévi-Strauss has pointed out" (7).

13. Although by definition the souls in purgatory must have confessed their sorrow for having committed any capital sin, there remains "a theological distinction between the meritorious satisfaction enjoined in confession and the type of satisfaction required by divine justice in Purgatory. . . . As acts of justice they [the pains of Purgatory] pay off a debt to God, and as acts of virtue they uproot the causes of sin" (Armour 1983, 68–69).

14. Morgan 1990, 110. The seven capital ("deadly") sins or vices were first formulated from Cassian's list of eight by St. Gregory the Great (c. 540–604). See Gregory's *Moralia in Job* 31.45 (*PL* 76:620 ff.), where *tristitia* takes the place of *accidia*. For a history of the seven capital vices in medieval thought, see Casagrande and Vecchio 2000.

15. See the section in Cogan 1999, 104–19, "The Seven Capital Vices and the Three Appetites: The Underlying Symmetry of Hell and Purgatory." Cogan stresses

the fact that "Dante's overall distribution of the vices to the appetites—his association of pride and envy to the will, of anger and sloth to the irascible appetite, and of avarice, gluttony, and lust to the concupiscible appetite—are [*sic*] essentially unique to him" (104).

16. Cogan (1999, 106–7) points out that St. Thomas's definition of pride does "not involve others at all. . . . It is distinctly unconventional to conceive of pride, as related to injustice, but by making this relation, Dante can link pride to the will."

17. Le Goff 1984, 244. Cf. Aquinas, *S. Th.* 3. Suppl. 97.1, ad, 2: "The punishment of purgatory is not intended principally to torment but to purify: hence, it must be inflicted by fire alone which is above all possessed of the power to purify." Paul's remark that "the fire will test what sort of work each has done" (1 Cor. 3.13) was cited "throughout the Middle Ages, as the biblical basis for Purgatory" (Le Goff 1984, 8).

18. See, e.g., Gautier de Metz's poem *Le miroir du monde*, written c. 1247, in which Eden is described as "enclosed by flaming fire that rises up to heaven" ("il est cloz de feu ardent / qui jusqu' aux nues va flammant" [cited in Delumeau 1994, 68]). It is surprising that Le Goff (1984, 345) should write, "Dante frequently alludes to the one feature that before his time was more or less identified with Purgatory: fire," when Dante's economical use of fire is in fact one of the truly original elements in his description of purgatory.

19. Claire Honess (1998, 39) points out that Bertrand's *contrapasso* "is more perfect than has been generally recognized, for his sin is not simply that of dividing father and son, king and prince, but more particularly of *using his poetry* in order to effect this division. . . . The character of Bertran thus offers Dante-*personaggio* an object lesson which he must bear in mind when he returns to write the *Commedia*."

20. As Cogan (1999, 38) observes, "If Dante has waited until encountering these sewers of discord before making the notion of a *contrapasso* explicit, it is, I believe, so we can hear the echo of Paul in Galatians: 'Quae enim seminaverit homo, haec et metet' (Gal. 6:7). Whatever a man sows, so shall he reap. And this is precisely what Bertram is undergoing."

21. Barański (2000a, 166) contrasts the salvific role of the baptismal font (*Inf.* 19.16–21) and the hole in the rock of hell: "l'opposizione tra una pietra con fessure che salva e un'altra che dannava per l'eternità."

22. Cf. the juxtaposition found in Brunetto Latini, *Tresor* (1:71; 62): "Il [St. Peter] fist cheir a la terre Simon Magues ki s'en aloit au ciel contremont . . . Noiron le fist crucefier le chief desous et les piés contremont xxxviii ans après la passion Jhesucrist .ii. iors a l'issue du mois de jung . . ."

23. Cf. Cogan 1999, 40: "While it would be proper to say that the souls in Purgatory are being purged by the opposite of their sins, the sinners in Hell are not tormented by a sin's opposites, but by the sin itself."

24. For further analysis, see Ferrante 1993a, 155–56. Moore (1899, 194–95) shows that Dante followed St. Bonaventure rather than Aquinas in his ordering of the seven deadly vices, which was most likely inspired by "the very chapter of that treatise [*Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis*] from which Dante seems to have derived the idea of making the Blessed Virgin his first example of each successive virtue . . . held up as the antidote to each of the Seven Deadly Sins on the several *Cornici* of Purgatory."

25. "The presence of desire in the pilgrim allows the poet to describe his ascent as a dynamic progression; likewise, the preservation of desire in the blessed allows him

to portray them as individual characters" (Pertile 1993b, 155). Psaki (2000, 56) rightly takes Dante scholars to task for the way in which they have desexualized the pilgrim/poet's descriptions of his reactions to Beatrice's celestial beauty: "The language Dante uses to describe the love that we cannot begin to understand, the underlying machine which powers the pilgrim's ascent . . . is the language of bodily, sexual love."

26. For the complex interplay between the properties of the planets, as understood in medieval astrology, and the souls portrayed in each, see Kay 1994. However, Cornish (2000, 9) does well to point out that the planets and constellations displayed in the *Comedy* "usually have more to do with their being models of beauty, order, and justice. Rather than determining human behavior . . . [they] would seem to serve as standards for moral conduct."

27. The idea that the spots on the moon were caused by variations in the density of the planet's substance is found in a number of medieval texts, including Averroës's *De substantia orbis* and the *Roman de la Rose* (ll. 16840–85). For Dante's metaphysics of light, see Mazzeo 1960, 56–132. The concept that God is light is at the core of the treatise *Of the Celestial Hierarchy*, falsely attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, which inspired not only Dante (*Par.* 10.115–17) but also Suger at St. Denis and the designers of Gothic cathedrals. The whole of creation stems from and reflects uncreated, divine light, which links together all creatures with love. Robert Grosseteste asserted: "Light is what constitutes the perfection and the beauty of bodily forms" (cited in Duby 1981, 148).

28. For a good analysis of Dante's angelology, see Bemrose 1983, including the important observation that "this precise one-to-one correspondence between heavens and angelic orders seems to be peculiar to Dante. . . . I have not found it in any other Christian writer" (85, n. 20).

29. Franciscan hagiography made use of this concept, e.g., in praise of St. Clare: "Her angelic face was clearer and more beautiful after each prayer, so radiant it was with joy. Truly the gracious Lord . . . so filled his humble spouse with his rays that she gave off the divine light all about her" (cited in Duby 1981, 148).

30. See above, chap. 4, "Astronomy and Angels." In the *Comedy* Dante used the sequence of angelic orders given by Pseudo-Dionysius and most strikingly illustrated in the mosaics of the Florentine Baptistry, his *bel San Giovanni* (cf. *Par.* 28.130–35, where Gregory is described as laughing at his own—and Dante's former—mistake, on his arrival in the Crystalline Heaven).

31. Cf Auerbach 1946, 483–84, where Joshua (aided by Rahab at Jericho) is recorded as a *figura* of Christ, with the essential proviso that "both terms of a figurative relation are equally true, equally real, equally present: the figurative sense does not destroy the literal, and the literal does not deprive the figurative of its quality of a *real historical event*" (my emphasis).

32. See Aquinas, *S. Th.* 1.2.3.4.5: "human beatitude consists in the knowledge of God, which is an act of the intellect [quae est actus intellectus]." Aquinas quotes (1.2.3.4.5, ad quartum) Augustine, who asserted that only what is known can be loved (*De Trinitate* 10.1–2: "Non enim diligitur nisi cognitum").

33. For the problems surrounding the presence of Siger in Dante's paradise, see the differing conclusions by Gilson (1948, 257–76) and Mazzotta (1993, 112–15). For a good introduction to Joachim and Dante, see Reeves 1980.

34. For Albert's influence on Dante, see Nardi 1944, 1960b, 1983.

35. Just as God gave Solomon more than he had requested (3 Kings 3.13), so—for Dante and his contemporaries—Solomon had been granted the extraordinary

privilege of writing the Book of Proverbs (*Conv.* 3.11.12) and Ecclesiastes (*Conv.* 2.10.10) and, above all, of composing the Song of Songs (*Conv.* 2.5.5), which set forth under an allegorical veil of erotic language and imagery the ideal relationship between Christ and his Church, as well as that between Christ and the individual human soul.

36. Those who delight in numerology will be interested to note that twenty-four was the number indicating the twelve prophets plus the twelve apostles; twenty-four elders appear in Revelation 44—these could be interpreted as signifying the universal body of saints or *universitas sanctorum* (Meyer and Suntrup 1987, 680–81).

37. See Scott 1996b, 82–84. The other pagan, Trajan, was saved through the intercession of St. Gregory the Great on account of his act of mercy and justice to a poor widow (*Purg.* 10.73–93).

38. Lawrence (1984, 25–26) makes the point that in fact Benedict “did not envisage anything that could be called a monastic order. . . . But the essence of Benedict’s ideas impressed itself upon the Western ascetical tradition. Men came to think of monks as people whose religious life was governed by a written code . . . the ‘regular life’—life according to a rule.”

39. Southern 1990, 214. The hegemony of monks is well illustrated in the following anecdote: “Abbon of Fleury, the abbot of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire at the end of the tenth century, went on to refer to Jesus’ parable of the sower and the different yields from seed to express the idea of different and precisely defined rewards awaiting Christians in the other world according to their status in this life—in the ratio of 100 for monks, 60 for the clergy, and 30 for the laity” (Miccoli 1990, 54).

40. *The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. and trans. J. McCann (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1952), 39.

41. As already noted, astral determinism (the belief that human beings were entirely conditioned by the stars) is specifically rejected in the central (fiftieth) canto of the poem, because it eliminated free will. Nevertheless, it was a part of medieval belief that the stars influenced things, events, and people on earth. Indeed, as Scaglione (1967, 154) has written, “Deep in the medieval man there lay an instinct that compelled him to attribute life and soul to every part of the universe . . . and the astrological view of astral influences on our destinies tended not to dehumanize man . . . but rather to make the whole world anthropomorphic.” See *Par.* 2.127–41 and 8.97–148.

42. The striking omission of St. Dominic from the list (cf. *Par.* 12) may be explained not only by the poet’s penchant for the number three but also by the fact that the Dominicans followed what was known as the Rule of St. Augustine (Lawrence 1984, 204–5).

43. The significance of the harrowing of hell has been well illustrated by Iannucci in various essays (e.g., Iannucci 1997).

44. For Dante’s limbo, see Mazzoni 1965, esp. 69–84; Padoan 1977, 103–24; Pertile 1980; Iannucci 1979–80. Iannucci states: “The structure of medieval depictions of Limbo is comic. . . . Only a man like Dante, who possessed a sense of tragedy as well as comedy, a humanistic sympathy for pagan culture. . . . could overturn this structure” (104–5). For “The Pagans and Grace” in Dante, see Foster (1977, 220–53), who remarks, “A strange isolation from God seems then to be the lot of pagan man, as Dante represents him. . . . [H]e can only expect, after death, an eternity of unsatisfied longing. And the grace that would save him from this unhappy

destiny is not *normally* available to him. The gap between nature and grace has been enlarged to the widest extent consistent with Christian belief” (249).

45. Aquinas, *S. Th.* 3.15.9, resp and ad 1: “then the action undertaken for justice is not to be attributed to anger but to reason” (cf. Matt. 21.12–13). Cf. Hollander 2001, 107: “the protagonist’s at times harsh reaction to various sinners . . . is not . . . a sign of his falling into sinful attitudes himself, but proof of his righteous indignation as he learns to hate sin.”

46. Cf. Barbi 1941, 318–27; Padoan 1975, 12; Petrocchi 1983, 8.

47. For “the heterogeneity of the ethical values which have been homogenised by means of the apparently rigorous classification” of sins in *Inferno*, see Boyde 2000, 67–69.

MICHELANGELO PICONE

The Classical Context of the Ulysses Canto

Before attempting to read a canto as decisive and demanding as the Ulysses canto, it is as well to declare one's hermeneutic strategies at the outset. The first of these strategies is based on the idea that the Ulysses theme, which forms the story of the second part of the canto, permeates the rest of the canto by a sort of semantic irradiation. Lines 1–84, which establish the wider narrative framework of the protagonist's journey, the crossing of the eighth *bolgia* and the vision of the souls condemned to this part of Hell, constitute a narrative preparation and ideological justification for lines 85–142, which bring us the encounter with Ulysses and the story of his last voyage. The second strategy arises from the wish to study the canto in the light of its literary and cultural genealogy. In Canto XXVI of *Inferno* Dante's ambition is to provide the definitive version of the Ulysses myth, and restore the compromised *auctoritas* of the "supreme poet" ("poeta sovrano") Homer. In order to do this, Dante has to set up a dialogue with all the other versions of the myth—classical versions (both the epic type and the moral-philosophical type), late Latin versions (the so-called medieval Homer) and vernacular versions (the *matière de Troie*, or "Troianorum gesta" as they are called in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*). Seen in this perspective, Canto XXVI appears as the reconstruction of an enormous jigsaw puzzle—aimed at restoring the enigmatic figure of Ulysses—where the original classical

From *Patterns in Dante: Nine Literary Essays*, edited by Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin and Jennifer Petrie, pp. 147–68. Copyright © 2005 by the Foundation for Italian Studies, UCD, National University of Ireland.

pieces of the puzzle, tracked down through a detailed process of *inventio*, have been reorganized by the *dispositio* and renewed by the *elocutio* of the modern poet Dante.

In fact, an intertextual study of *Inferno* XXVI shows how Dante tries to realize and complete the “classical” version of the Ulysses myth (specifically, the one offered by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*), while at the same time unmasking the inauthentic version which was circulating in his own time (the version contained in late Latin anthologies and Old French reworkings). In rewriting the Ulysses myth Dante wants to remove the medieval Homer (the various versions of Dictys and Dares) from the pedestal on which he had been placed by intellectuals of the thirteenth century (starting with Guido delle Colonne), replacing him with the new Christian Homer, meaning the author of the *Commedia* himself.¹ He can only attain this objective, however, by making use of the Latin epic tradition: Virgil, Lucan, Statius, but above all Ovid, the Latin Homer attested in Books XIII and XIV of the *Metamorphoses*.²

Looking at the *imitatio* and *aemulatio* of Ovid in Canto XXVI, we immediately observe an element which indirectly confirms the canto’s unity, clearly placed under the aegis of the Greek hero. In the first part of the canto, which lists the sins of Ulysses and justifies his presence in this sector of Malebolge, the predominant echo is of Book XIII of the *Metamorphoses* (containing the dispute between Ajax and Ulysses over the ownership of Achilles’s weapons), while in the second part of the canto, devoted to the story of the sublime ocean adventure, the predominant memory is of *Metamorphoses* XIV (centred on the meeting of Aeneas with Macareus, one of Ulysses’s “companions” who decided not to follow him in that adventure).

Even from this first glance at the critical questions raised by the canto, one can clearly see the misguided perspective adopted by those readers, Romantic and post-Romantic, who put all their emphasis on the originality of Dante’s invention. According to that opinion (taken over wholesale into Sapegno’s commentary), Dante’s imagination was stimulated by his “ignorance” of what had really befallen Ulysses. Sapegno writes that “this happy ignorance was to leave [Dante] a broader margin of imaginative freedom in creating his image of the Greek hero, working on those few hints which he could glean from the authors he knew best.” An aesthetic of this kind, based on an admiration for untrammelled personal creativity—imagination in the Romantic sense of the term—cannot be applied retrospectively to a poet like Dante, who considers Classical *auctoritas* as the essential basis on which modern *auctoritas* can be constructed, entering into dialogue with the ancient heritage so that the voice of modernity may sound out clearer and stronger.³

After the opening twelve lines, which make a bridge back to the previous canto (in the ditch of thieves Dante has met some of his fellow citizens, a

sufficient reason for launching a sarcastic aside against Florence, which beats its wings over sea and land but whose name “is spread through Hell”),⁴ we find two *terzine* describing the two pilgrims moving into the eighth ditch of Malebolge, and also launching the first segment of the early part of the canto:

Noi ci partimmo, e su per le scalee
 che n'avea fatto iborni a scender pria,
 rimontò 'l duca mio e trasse mee;
 e proseguendo la solinga via,
 tra le schegge e tra' rocchi de lo scoglio
 lo piè senza la man non si spedia.
 (*Inferno*, XXVI. 13–18)

[We departed thence, and by the stairs which the jutting rocks had made for our descent before, my leader remounted and drew me up; and pursuing the solitary way among the jags and rocks of the ridge, the foot could not advance without the hand.]

The general meaning of these two *terzine* is fairly clear: in order to reach the bridge over the eighth ditch, Dante and Virgil climb back up the same “scalee” (natural stairway) as they had descended in order to see the bottom of the seventh ditch. As the terrain is difficult, they have to save themselves from falling by clutching onto stones protruding from the rock-face. In line 14, Petrocchi's standard edition (reproduced here) presents a reconstituted reading: *n'avea* replaces the form *n'avean*, found in the manuscript tradition, while *i borni* rather than *iborni* is a conjectural *lectio difficilior*—from the Latin *eburneum*, supposedly meaning “pale”. Having noted that the adjective *iborni* does not exist in early Italian, and that its meaning is here reconstructed inappropriately (to the medieval mind, ivory suggested smoothness and not paleness),⁵ one may attempt to explain the semantic value of the word *borni*, and hence of the rejected reading, situating it within the thematic and ideological coherence of the canto. And when one looks at it in this way, one of the leitmotifs of this canto, the presence of a boundary and the attempt to go beyond it, in fact begins to emerge right from the opening phrases. The Italian words *i borni* should be seen as related to the French *bornes*, a fundamental concept in the romance *quête*, used to denote the boundary between the known world and the unknown world (a boundary which the Arthurian knight, in search of extraordinary adventure, must seek to cross). The *bornes Galvoie* or the *bornes Hercules* (on which the “riguardi” of Hercules are modelled in line 108 of this canto), the *bornes Alexandre* and similar phrases have their counterpart in Dante's poem—as well as “borni”

and “riguardi” we find “ronchion”, “schegge” etc.—; they recur, however, not as negative signs (as in the French romances) but with a positive value: they help the pilgrim on his journey.⁶ The *borni* of Canto XXVI serve to separate the world of damnation (in which Ulysses is confined) from the world of salvation (through which the pilgrim poet moves). Significantly, in line 44 it is a “ronchion” (crag), functioning as a boundary, that saves the traveller from falling into the ditch below.

In the *terzine* which follow, we find the first important echo of Ovid:

Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio
 quando drizzo la mente a ciò ch'io vidi,
 e più lo 'nvegno affreno ch'ì non soglio,
 perché non corra che virtù nol guidi;
 sí che, se stella bona o miglior cosa
 m'ha dato 'l ben, ch'io stessi nol m'invidi.⁷
 (*Inferno*, XXVI. 19–24)

[I sorrowed then, and sorrow now again, when I turn my mind to what I saw; and I curb my genius more than I am wont, lest it run where virtue does not guide it; so that, if a kindly star or something better has granted me the good, I may not grudge myself that gift.]

As with the earlier episode of Francesca, Dante also feels human solidarity and spiritual affinity with Ulysses. There he sympathized actively with the tragedy of love, here he sympathizes with the tragedy of magnanimity—passions which if indulged without the necessary degree of control can lead to moral ruin. The sense of sympathy (“Allor mi dolsi . . .”) must never spill over into identification, however, and cannot interfere with the capacity of judgement. What Dante is showing in these lines is precisely the exercise of that judgement, differentiating his behaviour from that of Ulysses and condemning the excessive use of intelligence (*hybris*) by the mythological hero. This kind of comparison between Dante and Ulysses, and thus between the Christian world and the pagan world, emerges from a textual comparison between the *Commedia* and the *Metamorphoses*. The passage from Ovid directly involved here is the speech made by Ulysses to persuade the Greeks to give him, not Ajax, the arms of Achilles:⁸

Huic modo ne prosit, quod, ut est, hebes esse videtur
 neve mihi noceat, quod vobis semper, Achivi,
 profuit ingenium; meaque haec facundia, siqua est,

quae nunc pro domino, pro vobis saepe locuta est,
invidia careat, bona nec sua quisque recuset.

(*Metamorphoses*, XIII. 135–39)

[I only ask you not to favour my opponent because he appears to be a blunt fellow—as indeed he is—or be prejudiced against me because of my cleverness which has always been used to your advantage. Do not let this eloquence of mine, if indeed I have any, give rise to ill-feeling. It pleads now for its master, but has often been used on your behalf. Each man must employ the talents that he has.]

With these words Ulysses intends to answer Ajax's taunt that he is more an accomplished speechmaker than a fearless fighter. Ulysses deliberately picks up Ajax's accusation and asks the Greeks to excuse him if, for the purposes of this dispute, he exploits for his own benefit ("pro domino") the cleverness ("ingenium") which on so many other occasions he had placed at the service of the common cause ("pro vobis"). Nobody can deny the gifts that nature has conferred on him ("bona nec sua quisque recuset").

The lexical and thematic parallels between the Dantean text and the Ovidian intertext are crystal clear. Both texts stress cleverness and rhetorical skill ("facundia"), which are the virtues possessed to an extraordinary degree by both the Christian hero and the mythological hero. The same contrast of temporal frames in the source text ("modo [. . .] semper", "nunc [. . .] saepe") reappears in the target text ("*allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio*"); the words "invidia careat" yield "ch'io stessi nol *m'invidi*"; and the words "bona sua" lead to "*l ben*" and "*stella bona*". Equally clear, however, are the differences; in fact, when Dante recalls the Ovidian source he is instantly led to correct it. Whereas Ovid's Ulysses defends his uncompromising use of cleverness ("ingenium"), Dante recognizes that cleverness must always be reined in; while the older Ulysses is convinced that his "ingenium" is a personal gift, the newer Ulysses recognizes that this gift was received from God. The outcome of this comparison is written into Canto XXVI, and the *auctor* of the *Commedia* is the one who reveals it: God will demand an account from man for the use he has made of his intelligence, punishing the man who used it sinfully (Ulysses) and exalting the one who used it virtuously (Dante).

This brings us to the two similes in lines 15–42; the function of these similes and the way they mesh in with the Ulysses theme have not so far been fully explored.⁹ The relationship that is set up between the pilgrim, looking down from his position high on the bridge, and the damned, who are below in the eighth ditch, is analysed first of all by analogy, through a little naturalistic scene (the image of the peasant on the brow of a hill, observing the spectacle

of the fireflies lighting up the valley below, on a summer's evening), and then in terms of a Biblical event (when Elijah was snatched up into Heaven before the astonished eyes of Elisha). Through the first, quantitative, comparison Dante indicates the number of souls placed in this ditch ("Quante [. . .] tante"): the damned are as numerous as fireflies on summer nights. The second image conveys qualitative information: the souls are wrapped in the punishing flames just as Elijah was enveloped in the flames of the fiery chariot. Beyond the structural function of these similes, there is a deeper one, in tune with the Ulysses theme. In the first case Dante compares himself to the peasant who is not only placed up on high but also resting (line 25) after a day's work, while the firefly-souls (including Ulysses) are condemned to their useless toil of lighting up the eternal night of their dwelling-place in Hell. The link between Dante and the peasant thus emphasizes the positive, "comic" conclusion of the pilgrim poet's existential and cognitive journey. The link between Ulysses and the fireflies, by contrast, emphasizes the negative, "tragic" outcome of Ulysses's voyage and the culture which it represents. In the second simile there is of course similarity between the term of comparison and the thing compared, but more importantly there is difference: whereas for Elijah being wrapped in fire is part of a process of glorification (with which Dante identifies), for Ulysses the same phenomenon alludes to a process of degradation (bringing to mind his final dramatic shipwreck).

The second segment of the first part of the canto (lines 43–84) opens with a description of the pilgrim-poet's extreme excitement as he prepares to meet the most extraordinary hero of Classical antiquity and to confront his own mythological "double".¹⁰ He observes the ditch with feverish attention as Virgil explains that the flames act as "wraps" (line 48) hiding and tormenting the damned souls; but this is not what interests the traveller: what he wants to know is *who* is concealed within a very peculiar flame that appears divided into two parts, like the one that (according to Statius in the *Thebaid*) rose from the pyre of Eteocles and Polynices:

Chi è 'n quel foco che vien sí diviso
di sopra, che par surger de la pira
dov' Eteòcle col fratel fu miso?
(*Inferno*, XXVI. 52–54)

[Who is in that fire which comes so divided at its top that it seems to rise from the pyre where Eteocles was laid with his brother?]

In Statius's account Polynices, mortally wounded in the clash in which he had killed his brother Eteocles, died and his body was placed in the pyre in which his brother's body was burning:

Ecce iterum fratres: primos ut contigit artus
 ignis edax, tremuere rogi et novus advena busto
 pellitur; exundant diviso vertice flammae
 alternosque apices abrupta luce coruscant.
 (*Thebaid*, XII. 429–32)

[Once more behold the brothers: as soon as the devouring fire touched the body, the pile shook, and the newcomer is driven from the pyre; a flame streams up with double head, each darting tongues of flashing light.]

Here the flames of the pyre, on making contact with the new body, divide towards their tip (“diviso vertice”, which Dante translates literally as “diviso/di sopra”) forming two tongues of fire (“alternosque apices”), exactly as we now see with the “fiamma cornuta” (line 68) in which Ulysses and Diomedes are confined.¹¹ It may be felt that the full implications underlying this intertextuality with Statius have not yet been fully explored. The comparison with Eteocles and Polynices tells us that Ulysses and Diomedes are not sharing their flame peacefully in the other world; rather, they are dramatic antagonists. The eternal closeness of the two souls, as earlier with Paolo and Francesca and later with Ugolino and Ruggieri, serves to recall the moment of their fall into sin and thus the reasons why they are condemned to Hell.

Virgil’s identification of the two souls involves recalling the misdeeds that they committed together while they were alive:

Rispuose a me: “Là dentro sì martira
 Ulisse e Diomede, e così insieme
 a la vendetta vanno come a l’ira.”
 (*Inferno*, XXVI. 55–57)

[He answered me: “Therewithin are tormented Ulysses and Diomedes, and they go together thus under the vengeance as once under the wrath.”]

Guilt and punishment go together: while the “ira” is certainly God’s anger smiting the two partners in crime, we might take the “vendetta” to mean the reciprocal punishment that Ulysses and Diomedes inflict on each other simply by being together. The origin of this *terzina* may certainly be found in Ovid:

Luce nihil gestum, nihil est Diomede remoto.
 Si semel ista datis meritis tam vilibus arma,

dividite et pars sit maior Diomedis in illis.

(*Metamorphoses*, XIII. 100–02)

[He did nothing in the light of day, nothing without the help of Diomedes. Supposing you should bestow those arms as a reward for such trivial services, then divide them and let the larger part go to Diomedes.]

With these words, spoken during the dispute over Achilles's weapons, Ajax maintains that without Diomedes's help Ulysses could not have accomplished any heroic deeds. The merits of Ulysses are therefore less than those of Diomedes, and if a decision were reached to award him the arms of Achilles, the greater part ("pars [. . .] maior") should by right go to Diomedes, the better warrior. If Dante takes over from Ovid the theme of the inseparability of the two Greek heroes, he corrects the Latin author on one important point. The more famous of the two heroes is not Diomedes but Ulysses: he is the greater horn, "lo maggior corno della fiamma antica" (line 85).¹²

The misdeeds for which Ulysses and his fellow sufferer Diomedes have been condemned to the eighth ditch of Malebolge are all connected with the Trojan War, that is to say, with the epic story of the *Iliad* and not with the adventure story of the *Odyssey* (which will however provide the inspiration for the second half of the canto). This observation would seem to take on fundamental importance in the economy of Dante's reception of the Ulysses myth. Furthermore, these misdeeds are attested by definite Classical *auctoritates*. By comparing these intertexts, indeed, it is possible to form an impression of the real nature of Ulysses's guilt, and hence of the type of sin punished in the eighth *bolgia*.¹³ For present purposes it will be enough to analyse just the first of the charges laid against him:

E dentro da la lor fiamma si geme
l'agguato del caval che fé la porta
onde uscì de' Romani il gentil seme.

(*Inferno*, XXVI. 58–60)

[And in their flame they groan for the ambush of the horse which made the gate by which the noble seed of the Romans went forth.]

This treacherous deed, which the *Aeneid* seems to attribute to Ulysses alone (II, 43–44: "aut ulla putatis / dona carere dolis Danaum? Sic notus Ulixes?"), but for which Dante also lays the blame at the door of Diomedes

(the impersonal “*si geme*” includes both), succeeded in deciding the Trojan War in favour of the Greeks. Virgil’s hexameters just quoted come from Laocoön’s speech urging the Trojans to reject the Greek gifts, as no Greek is free from guile. That horse undoubtedly conceals some treachery, and the treachery, Laocoön concludes, can only come from Ulysses, “*scelerum inventor*” [“criminal mastermind”: line 164]. In Dante’s *Inferno* Ulysses pays the price for his addiction to deception. Ulysses is condemned to the eighth ditch of Malebolge not for having brought about the fall of Troy—which was a providential event, inasmuch as it breached the opening from which the noble seed of Rome came forth (“*fé la porta / onde uscì de’ Romani il gentil seme*”)—but for the sinful way in which he achieved that result. His sin, in essence, is not that he counselled fraud, but that he personally carried out fraud: in this case by his skill in planning that treacherous war machine, the Trojan horse, but in other cases through the use of language, as when he persuaded Achilles to participate in the Trojan War (*Inferno*, XXVI. 61–62).¹⁴

This second narrative segment closes with a return to the motif of the pilgrim-poet’s anxious wait to speak to the Greek hero. His insistent demand (lines 64–69) is answered by Virgil, who, instead of restraining his impatient disciple, praises him: “*La tua preghiera è degna / di molta loda*” (lines 70–71). In fact Virgil’s only hesitation stems not from Dante’s state of mind, but rather from his state of education, his ability to carry on a dialogue with Ulysses and Diomedes, who, being Greeks, might disdain Dante’s attempts at communication: “*ch’ei sarebbero schivi, / perch’ e’ fuor greci, forse del tuo detto*” (lines 74–75). The low, “comic” stylistic level of the modern protagonist will not be able to match the high, “tragic” level of the ancient character. That is why Virgil, *auctor* of high tragedy (“*alta tragedia*”; *Inferno*, XX. 113), must be the one who interviews Ulysses, rather than leaving it to Dante:

O voi che siete due dentro ad un foco,
 s’io meritai di voi mentre ch’io vissi,
 s’io meritai di voi assai o poco
 quando nel mondo li alti versi scrissi,
 non vi movete; ma l’un di voi dica
 dove, per lui, perduto a morir gissi.
 (*Inferno*, XXVI. 79–84)

[O you who are two within one fire, if I deserved of you while I lived, if I deserved of you much or little when in the world I wrote the lofty lines, move not; but let the one of you tell where he went, lost, to die.]

The heavy semantic emphasis placed on the “alti versi” is directed precisely towards the problem of matching the stylistic range of interviewer and interviewee. But it also serves to contrast the fascination which Classical epic (especially the *Aeneid*) feels for the feats of Ulysses (both good and bad), against the fascination which medieval romance (and in this case the *Commedia*) feels for the hero’s adventures, especially on his last voyage. From this stems the request concerning the precise circumstances (hitherto undiscovered by anybody) surrounding his death: “ma l’un di voi dica / dove, per lui, perduto a morir gissi.”¹⁵ The fact that Virgil questions the Greek hero on the last event, and the decisive one, in his life can perhaps help us to explain the value of the phrase, twice repeated, “s’io merita di voi”. This is far from being a formula indicating modesty (as Benvenuto da Imola took it), given that Virgil is perfectly aware that he has deserved nothing in the eyes of the two Greek heroes, accused in the *Aeneid* of the worst crimes. Nor can it be taken as an offensively sarcastic expression (as urged by Padoan and Brugnoli), though Ulysses’s parting words to Virgil in the following canto (“istra ten va; piú non t’adizzo” [line 21: “Now go your way, I do not urge you more”]) might suggest some such attitude. The phrase appears to contain a last, forlorn attempt by the Latin poet to rescue the good name of these characters (which he himself had blackened) through the Italian poem. Virgil’s intervention, as recorded in the *Commedia*, will therefore serve to bring out the magnanimous side of Ulysses’s personality, thus favouring the autobiographical account by the Greek hero, who will tell the world about his last sublime adventure, precursor to the Christian quest of the pilgrim-poet Dante.¹⁶

At this point the second part of Canto XXVI begins: the part which readers old and new love best (lines 85–142). After the narrative frame of the journey, here is the inserted tale which the character recounts to the two pilgrims who have met him on their way. Ulysses the “politician” and fraudulent soldier, Ulysses the warrior who fights with the weapons of deceptive trickery, is eclipsed by Ulysses the adventurer, the wanderer, as Stanford defines him, the navigator travelling not towards Ithaca but towards the lost Eden, not a homeward but an outward hero.¹⁷ From the textual zone influenced by *Metamorphoses* XIII we move into the zone influenced by Book XIV; in effect the story told about his voyage by Dante’s Ulysses takes up the story left unfinished by Ovid’s Macareus.¹⁸

The few lines that set the scene before the character’s speech serve to explain how his speech is possible. We see the tip of the “horned flame” moving as though it were a human tongue.¹⁹ The awkwardness of this linguistic articulation creates a glaring contrast with the ease with which Ulysses had (evilly) used his tongue during his lifetime (thus, it is what defines the *contrapasso*). Moreover, his well-known qualities as a seductive *fabulator* are here

mortified, given that he is telling his story not to a king or to some lovestruck girls, but rather to two poets, one of whom is going to transcribe his words and amplify God's punishment on him.

Dante starts Ulysses's account with the temporal adverb "Quando", a word that remains isolated at the end of line 90, undoubtedly to give us an idea of the difficulty with which the flame produces sounds, but also to make us understand that this is the decisive point in time for the hero's life. As well as the temporal dimension, the passage also indicates the spatial dimension, the point of departure of Ulysses's voyage (and we should notice the verb that he uses, "mi diparti": this is not a simple leavetaking but a definitive one):

Quando
 mi diparti' da Circe, che sottrasse
 me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta,
 prima che sí Enëa la nomasse,
 né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta
 del vecchio padre, né 'l debito amore
 lo qual dovea Penelopè far lieta,
 vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore
 ch'ì' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto
 e de li vizi umani e del valore;
 ma misi me per l'alto mare aperto
 sol con un legno e con quella compagna
 picciola da la qual non fui deserto.
 (*Inferno*, XXVI. 90–102)

[When I departed from Circe, who had detained me more than a year there near Gaeta, before Aeneas had so named it, neither fondness for my son, nor reverence for my aged father, nor the due love which would have made Penelope glad, could conquer in me the longing that I had to gain experience of the world, and of human vice and worth. But I put forth on the deep open sea with one vessel only, and with that small company which had not deserted me.]

It has already been pointed out that Dante's Ulysses begins his account at the point where Ovid's Macareus ended his.²⁰ Ovid in *Metamorphoses* XIV describes Macareus observing, from the safety of the beach where he is hiding, the ship bearing Ulysses and his companions away into the immensity of the seas towards an unknown and certainly dangerous destination. Dante, on the other hand, in recording the story of Ulysses in *Inferno* XXVI, boards that

ship and presents that extraordinary sea adventure at first hand, as though he had experienced it for himself—and indeed he did experience it through the intellectual journey of his *Convivio*.

Both the spatial elements relating to the location of Circe's island ("là presso a Gaeta"), and the temporal elements relating to the period which Ulysses and his companions had spent with the sorceress, are taken from Ovid: Macareus declares that he had remained a slave of Circe "longum per annum" (*Metamorphoses*, XIV. 435), and Dante translates this almost literally as "più d'un anno". Similarly, Dante's explanation of the name of the city of Gaeta, "before Aeneas had so named it" (in honour of his nurse Caieta), comes straight from Ovid, who speaks in line 157 of the "litora [. . .] nondum nutricis habentia nomen". It is at this point in time and space, fixed amid Ovidian fragments, that Dante's Ulysses begins his tale. The hero is faced with two conflicting types of possible journey. The first of these (described in lines 94–96) is the *nostos*, the return to Ithaca, the known homeland; the second alternative (set out in lines 97–99) is the *quête*, the search for the unknown homeland, the lost Eden.

Dante's Ulysses thus becomes a new Hercules at the crossroads. On the one hand he has the option of a voyage within the confines of the Mediterranean, and thus the choice of following domestic affections: love for his son Telemachus, "pieta" for his old father Laertes, and lastly the "debito amore" that has been too long delayed for Penelope.²¹ On the other hand he is drawn by the prospect of a voyage outside the boundaries of the Mediterranean, the ocean adventure, the choice of a total *experientia* of the world and the moral principles on which it is founded (human knowledge of vice and virtue), beyond which there lies (as we know from Genesis 3. 5) godlike knowledge. Depending on which alternative is chosen, we will have two contrasting images of Ulysses. The first is the "stoic" Ulysses, celebrated by Horace in his famous epistle to Lollius Maximus (*Epodes*, I. 2. 17–22), the hero who wants to know the cities and the customs of men ("multorum providus urbes, / et mores hominum inspexit" ["looked with discerning eyes upon the cities and manners of many men"]). The second alternative is the "Neoplatonist" Ulysses depicted in *Metamorphoses* XIV, the hero who is not content with knowing the *mores* of people but wants (like Adam) to know good and evil, the hero who is not satisfied by visiting the cities of men but wants to visit the city of God.²² Horace says of the first Ulysses that he could never be overwhelmed in the waves of adversity ("adversis rerum inmersibilis undis"; *Epodes*, I. 2. 22); of the second Ulysses, Ovid tells us only that he took ship but not that he came back.

But let us analyse the Ovidian passage that underpins the Dantean reinvention of the Ulysses myth. We are at the end of the story that Macareus tells Aeneas to bring him the latest information on the hero from Ithaca:

Resides et desuetudine tardi
 rursus inire fretum, rursus dare vela iubemur;
 ancipitesque vias et iter Titania vastum
 dixerat et saevi restare pericula ponti.
 Pertimui, fateor, nactusque hoc litus adhaesi.
 (*Metamorphoses*, XIV. 436–40)

[But when we had lost the habit of moving from place to place, and had become slow and settled, we were ordered to take to the sea again, to set sail once more. Circe, the Titan's daughter, had told us of the dangerous voyagings, the long, long journey and the perils of the cruel sea, that remained for us to endure. I confess that I was thoroughly frightened at the prospect and, having reached this shore, firmly remained here.]

Ovid presents an image of Ulysses antithetical to the one offered by Horace's epistle. Here Ulysses is not preparing the return to Ithaca of himself and his companions, but instead orders ("iubemur") his men, who have become lazy through long inaction and whose energy has been sapped by Circe's entertainments ("resides et desuetudine tardi"), to take again to the sea ("rursus inire fretum") so that they can complete the dangerous voyage foretold by Circe. To be more precise, the Titaness had spoken of hazardous sea-routes and difficult choices ("ancipitesque vias"), of an unending voyage ("iter vastum") and of the perils of the stormy sea ("saevi [. . .] pericula ponti")—those perils that Macareus no longer felt able to face, preferring safety on land ("hoc litus adhaesi") to seaborne adventure. Ovid leaves the reader with this scene of a sea voyage watched by a spectator. Dante picks up the same Ovidian scene, but makes the reader participate in Ulysses's voyage and the hero's final drowning.

Once a start has been made on the more dangerous path—the "alto mare aperto" ["deep open sea"] leading to total knowledge—Ulysses's adventure can begin, first within the confines of the Mediterranean up to the columns of Hercules (lines 103–20), then out in the boundless ocean until the mountain of Purgatory is sighted (lines 121–42). We may offer some brief comments, again of an intertextual nature, on this passage, which is undoubtedly the part of *Inferno* XXVI that has been most fully studied.²³ In order to describe the first stage of the Ulysses voyage Dante makes use of sources based not on exotic documents such as maps and the like, but rather on his preferred authority, Ovid.²⁴ Dante's memory produces two passages for this purpose, one from the *Metamorphoses* (VII. 220–25) and one from the *Ars Amatoria* (II. 79–81), which have to do with the narration

not of a sea voyage but of a flight: the tragic flight of Icarus.²⁵ One only has to recall the passage from the *Ars Amatoria* (“Iam Samos a *laeva*—*fuera*nt Naxosque *relictæ* / et Paros et Clario Delos amata deo—/ *dextra* Lebynthos erat silvisque umbrosa Calymne”) and put it side by side with the parallel passage in *Inferno* XXVI (“L’un lito e l’altro vidi infin la Spagna, / fin nel Morrocco, e l’isola d’i Sardi, / e l’altre che quel mare intorno bagna”, and later “*da la man destra mi lasciai Sibilia, / da l’altra già m’avea lasciata Setta*”), to realize that the journeys of both Icarus and Ulysses are placed within precise geographical coordinates, which serve to establish the space (land and islands) situated to the traveller’s right and left. This bird’s-eye view, as well as communicating a sense of the journey’s enormous speed, also offers a foretaste of its inevitable bad ending. Ulysses’s voyage, assimilated to Icarus’s flight, becomes in its turn a “folle volo” [“mad flight”: line 128] destined for a tragic conclusion, because it was activated by hubris, not virtue, by a prideful faith in one’s own resources, not by obedience to divine guidance. Just as Icarus has refused to take the advice of his father Daedalus, who warned him not to stray too near the sun, so also Ulysses declines to obey the injunction represented by the “riguardi” of Hercules (line 108), and sets off to seek the Garden of Eden before the time is ripe for humanity to recover its prelapsarian condition.

We thus come to the famous “orazion picciola” [“little oration”] that Ulysses addresses to his companions to persuade them to pass the columns of Hercules:

“O frati,” dissi, “che per cento milia
perigli siete giunti a l’occidente,
a questa tanto picciola vigilia
d’i nostri sensi ch’è del rimanente
non vogliate negar l’esperienzia,
di retro al sol, del mondo senza gente.

Considerate la vostra semenza:
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.”

(*Inferno*, XXVI. 112–20)

[“O brothers,” I said, “who through a hundred thousand dangers have reached the west, to this so brief vigil of the senses that remains to us choose not to deny experience, following the sun, of the world that has no people. Consider your origin: you were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge.”]

With this speech is Ulysses asking his companions to break a divine prohibition, or is he spurring them on to reach a higher form of knowledge? Is this Ulysses's last deception or the sublime announcement of a new truth? Is the speaker a diabolical tempter or a forerunner of the modern world? On this daunting question a heated debate has raged between critics,²⁶ and has succeeded in diverting attention away from the true focus of the oration and of the whole episode. Dante is not interested in determining whether Ulysses's rhetoric is good or bad, and thus whether Ulysses was right or wrong to pass the columns of Hercules. We are dealing not with an axiological question, but with what might be called a phenomenological question. Dante wants to contrast two realities, one limited and the other unlimited, one human and the other more than human. Thus we have on the one hand the positive aim of Ulysses's oration and his voyage (his great intuition of the Christian desire to return to the original homeland), and on the other hand the means used to achieve that aim: means that prove inadequate both subjectively (pride instead of humility) and objectively (the absence of Christ's revelation). It is therefore the unprincipled use of these means that is worthy of condemnation, not the legitimate, profoundly Christian *quête* for Eden, which the poet-pilgrim is bringing to proper completion by using suitable means.

In this connection one must not forget that the men to whom Ulysses addresses his speech are survivors of the metamorphic adventure of Circe. While reminding them of that terrible experience—their transformation into pigs (“bruti”)—Ulysses simultaneously conjures up the prospect of a contrary transformation into creatures that follow “virtue and knowledge”. The oration by Dante's Ulysses is thus underpinned by a profoundly Ovidian theme: the double metamorphosis, negative and positive, bestial and divine, of man.²⁷

After Ulysses has succeeded, through his speech, in persuading his companions to launch themselves into the final adventure of their lives, a start may now be made on recounting the night-time sea-journey towards Eden, a voyage lasting five months and bringing the crew of Ulysses's ship before an extraordinarily high mountain, the one that will, after Christ's death and resurrection, receive the souls of Purgatory:

Tutte le stelle già de l'altro polo
vedea la notte, e 'l nostro tanto basso,
che non surgëa fuor del marin suolo.
Cinque volte racceso e tante casso
lo lume era di sotto da la luna,
poi che 'ntrati eravam ne l'alto passo,
quando n'apparve una montagna, bruna

per la distanza, e parvemi alta tanto
quanto veduta non avèa alcuna.

(*Inferno*, XXVI. 127–35)

[The night now saw the other pole and all its stars, and ours so low that it did not rise from the ocean floor. Five times the light beneath the moon had been rekindled and as many quenched, since we had entered on the passage of the deep, when there appeared to us a mountain dark in the distance, and to me it seemed the highest I had ever seen.]

The theme of the night-time voyage, deprived of the light of the sun and lit solely by the moon and stars—guided, that is to say, not by divine grace but by human reason—has been so acutely analysed by critics, especially Piero Boitani, that there is no need to emphasize it further. It will be enough simply to point out the special semantic value taken on by the “distance” in which the “dark mountain” appears, combined with its seemingly infinite height. These indications should be taken not as physical but as metaphysical, relating to the geography of the soul, not the body. One cannot reach a mountain such as this in a ship driven by human strength, by oars (even if they seem to have wings), but only in the “vessel” of the steersman angel of *Purgatorio* II—which is moved neither by “oars” nor by “sail” but by “eternal feathers” (*Purgatorio*, II. 31–36). The Purgatorial vessel, which completes exactly the same journey from the mouth of the Tiber to the island of Purgatory, thus becomes the true fulfilment of what is represented by Ulysses’s ship; and both contribute to the sublime invention of the “legno che cantando varca” [“ship that singing makes her way”: *Paradiso*, II. 3], the ship of Dante’s poetry that will arouse the “admiration” of a god in Paradise (*Paradiso*, XXXIII. 96).²⁸

The last two *terzine* of the canto narrate the tragic end of Ulysses’s “mad flight”:

Noi ci allegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto,
ché de la nova terra un turbo nacque
e percosse del legno il primo canto.
Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l’acque;
a la quarta levar la poppa in suso
e la prora ire in giù, com’ altrui piacque,
infin che ’l mar fu sovra noi richiuso.

(*Inferno*, XXVI. 136–42)

[We rejoiced, but soon our joy was turned to grief, for from the new land a whirlwind rose and struck the forepart of the ship.

Three times it whirled her round with all the waters, and the fourth time it lifted the stern aloft and plunged the prow below, as pleased Another, till the sea closed over us.]

The semantic opposition in line 136 (“rejoiced” vs “grief”) sums up the tragedy of Ulysses, whose story began well but ends badly. In other words, the “rejoicing” relates to the initial optimism regarding the journey’s outcome, the sighting of the sought-after Object; the “grief”, on the other hand, conveys the final pessimism, the irreparable loss of the desired Object, of Eden. Ulysses’s journey, without the assistance of divine grace, comes to the same end as other journeys undertaken by mythological heroes who relied on their *hybris*, the same end as the flight of Icarus or Phaethon: a plunge into the depths of the sea. Ulysses’s ship plunges into those same depths, stricken not by Jove’s thunderbolt (as happened to Phaethon) but by the “whirlwind” unleashed by a power unknown to the pagan hero (“as pleased Another”), the power of the Christian God.²⁹ The unknown Object of the *quête*, God, thus becomes the executor of Ulysses’s tragic and exemplary punishment, whose cognitive ardour could not be matched by the necessary Christian virtues. The boundless sea closes over Ulysses like a tombstone, with the weight of a fearful sentence against which there is no appeal.

NOTES

1. This reading will be concerned only with the classical context of *Inferno* XXVI; but it would be equally important to conduct an in-depth examination of the medieval Latin and Romance background (basing oneself, perhaps, on the masterly study by W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* [Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1968]; but see also the essay by Avals in the bibliography below). On the reception of Homer in the thirteenth century one may consult the following works: F. Bruni, “Boncompagno da Signa, Guido delle Colonne, Jean de Meung: metamorfosi dei classici nel Duecento”, in his *Testi e chierici del medioevo* (Genoa, Marietti, 1991), pp. 43–70; G. Brugnoli, “Omero”, in *Dante e la “bella scola” della poesia: autorità e sfida poetica*, edited by A. A. Iannucci (Ravenna, Longo, 1993), pp. 65–85; R. Antonelli, “Omero ‘sire’ e ‘seignor de l’altissimo canto’?”, in *Posthomeric I* (Genoa, Faculty of Letters, Genoa University, 1997), pp. 63–83. The contributions by Damon, Thompson and Iannucci (see bibliography) adopt a hermeneutic rather than a historical or philological approach.

2. On the presence of Ovid in Dante, apart from the “Ovidio” entry in the *Enciclopedia dantesca* (IV, 225–36), by E. Paratore, one might consult M. Picone, “L’Ovidio di Dante”, in *Dante e la “bella scola”*, pp. 107–44 (where the previous bibliography is outlined). Ovidian intertextuality in this canto is emphasized in the essay by B. Reynolds, “Dante’s Tale of Ulysses”, in *Annali dell’Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, sezione romanza*, 2, i (1960), 49–66, and the *lecturae* by Padoan, Pertile, Pazzaglia, Picone and Brugnoli cited in the bibliography below.

3. In this connection, the studies collected in *Dante e la "bella scola"* are of decisive importance.

4. Right from these opening lines (narratively linked to the preceding canto) we can sense the Ulysses theme which is developed through the remainder of the canto: not only is there the involvement (albeit ironic) of immense stretches of land and sea, but we also see a definitive refusal by Dante the traveller (like Ulysses, a total *peregrinus*) to consider returning to his earthly fatherland.

5. Aware of this semantic forcing, L. Bellucci, "I 'borni' di *Inferno*, XXVI. 14", *Studi e problemi di critica testuale*, 9 (1974), 13–20, rather than jettisoning the phantom word *iborni*, interprets it in a manner which she considers contextually and historically more appropriate, recalling the Latin word *ebrium* and the French word *ivrogne*!

6. This motif belongs to the romance theme of the *passage périlleux*, on which see (among others) J. Frappier, *Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris, Hatier, 1969), pp. 59–60, 134–35 and *passim*.

7. According to G. Brugnoli, "Omero", pp. 61–62 and 65–66, one can also find traces of Ovid's name as an anagram, in the three places where the rhyme *-idi* occurs ("ch'io vidi", etc.).

8. Pertile (see bibliography) offers an excellent intertextual analysis in this regard (pp. 38–42).

9. On the significance of these similes see R. Lansing, *From Image to Idea: A Study of the Simile in Dante's "Commedia"* (Ravenna, Longo, 1977), pp. 112–23. See also M. Frankel, "The Context of Dante's Ulysses: The Similes in *Inferno*, XXVI. 25–42", *Dante Studies*, 104 (1986), 99–119; L. Ferretti Cuomo, "La polisemia delle similitudini nella *Divina commedia*: Eliseo: un caso esemplare", *Strumenti critici*, 10 (1975), 102–42.

10. It was Lotman, p. 96, who defined Ulysses as "Dante's original double".

11. Commentators also cite the parallel passage from Lucan, *Pharsalia*, I. 549–52, on which see Stull-Hollander, pp. 6–8.

12. According to G. Gorni, "Le 'ali' di Ulisse, emblema dantesco", in his *Lettera nome numero: l'ordine delle cose in Dante* (Bologna, Mulino, 1990), pp. 175–97, Dante presents Ulysses as the taller flame because he participated in all three of the fraudulent actions listed in lines 58–63, whereas Diomedes only took part in the second and third of them; but see below.

13. For a discussion of the various solutions proposed see Fubini, pp. 1–36. Another important contribution is J. Ahern, "Dante's Slyness: The Unnamed Sin of the Eighth Bolgia", *Romanic Review*, 73 (1982), 275–91.

14. Dante thus maintains that Ulysses's damnation springs from his unscrupulous use of intellectual resources for military and political purposes—an opinion which Machiavelli will overturn in *Il principe*, referring specifically to Cantos XXVI and XXVII of *Inferno*.

15. On the "romance" overtones of the term *perduto* see the contributions by Forti and Avallé; but the old essay by P. Rajna, "Dante e i romanzi della Tavola Rotonda", *Nuova antologia*, 1157 (year 55: 1920), 223–47 (see p. 224), remains fundamental.

16. On Ulysses's magnanimity, compared to Dante's own magnanimity, the essays by Forti and Scott are of prime importance.

17. On this point, as well as W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme*, see the contributions by Freccero and Iannucci.

18. For a more detailed analysis of this aspect, see M. Picone, "Dante, Ovidio e il mito di Ulisse", pp. 511–16.

19. This represents a reworking of the well-known Scriptural metaphor of the tongues of fire which come to rest on the Apostles' heads when they are filled with the Holy Spirit: see Corti's analysis.

20. A fact which is noted by B. Reynolds, "Dante's Tale of Ulysses", pp. 58–62; see also Padoan, pp. 176–78.

21. This triptych of Ulysses's domestic affections may recall, along with Cicero's *De Officiis* (III. 26), the first of Ovid's *Heroides*, lines 111–16, in which Penelope lists for her absent husband those considerations which should make him return home: the education of his son, the need to see his father while he is still alive, and the desire to embrace herself, his wife, whom he left as a young girl and will find as an old woman if he waits any longer.

22. See Pépin for the Neoplatonic Ulysses.

23. The best critical points are to be found in the *lecturae* by Friedrich, Freccero, Scott, Iannucci, Stierle and Barolini.

24. The "alto mare aperto" is an echo of Ovid's "fretum", combined with the "iter vastum" in the passage just analysed. The "ancipites vias" are given emphasis in the way already indicated. The words "sol con un legno" pick up lines 239–42 of Ovid ("una tamen [. . .] effugit"), while "con quella compagna/picciola" echoes "amissa sociorum partem" (line 247). Lastly, "da la qual non fui deserto" indicates that after the defection of Macareus there were no other deserters from Ulysses's ranks.

25. On the presence of the myth of Icarus (and that of Phaethon) in the *Commedia* see M. Picone, "Dante argonauta", in *Ovidius redivivus: von Ovid zu Dante*, edited by M. Picone and B. Zimmermann (Stuttgart, M&P, 1994), pp. 173–202 (pp. 178–86).

26. The leading exponent of the first hypothesis is Padoan, while the second hypothesis has been supported, among others, by Fubini, Forti, Pagliaro and Pazzaglia.

27. Line 118 is, incidentally, an echo of *Metamorphoses*, III. 543: "este, precor, memores qua sitis stirpe creati." On the echoes of a parallel speech by Caesar in *Pharsalia*, I. 299–302, see Stull-Hollander, pp. 8ff. A less convincing echo is the one involving *Aeneid*, I. 198–207 (most recently championed by Brugnoli). The two speeches are in fact completely antithetical: whereas Aeneas's speech looks forward to a happy ending to the seaborne adventure, the speech by Dante's Ulysses promises no calm destination, still less a secure one.

28. See M. Picone, "Dante argonauta", and P. Boitani, "Dall'ombra di Ulisse all'ombra d'Argo", in *Dante: mito e poesia: atti del secondo Seminario dantesco internazionale*, edited by M. Picone and T. Crivelli (Florence, Cesati, 1999), pp. 207–26.

29. These final lines of the canto allow us, then, to put forward the possibility of a further Ovidian intertext, to be found in Books II and VIII of the *Metamorphoses*, dedicated to retelling the myths of Icarus and Phaethon (but see also *Metamorphoses*, XIII. 955: "totaque vertuntur supra caput aequora nostrum"—referring however in a positive sense to the rite of purification of Glaucus). The reference to *Aeneid*, I. 114–17 and II. 564–67, normally made by commentators, is interesting from a verbal point of view, but less so from a thematic or ideological point of view, given that what is described there is not a shipwreck but an escape from shipwreck; in short, Virgil's Aeneas appears not as the model but as the anti-model on which Dante's Ulysses was constructed (in this connection see the *lecturae* by Scott and Stierle).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- F. Friedrich, "Odysseus in der Hölle (*Inferno* XXVI)", *Geistiges Überlieferung*, II (1942), 154–200; reprinted in his *Romanische Literaturen* (Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1972), pp. 71–118.
- G. Padoan, "Ulisse 'fandi fictor' e le vie della sapienza" [1960], in his *Il pio Enea, l'empio Ulisse: tradizione classica e intendimento medievale in Dante* (Ravenna, Longo, 1977), pp. 170–204.
- P. Damon, "Dante's Ulysses and the Mythic Tradition", in *Medieval Secular Literature*, edited by W. Matthews (Berkeley–Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1965), pp. 25–45.
- F. Forti, "Ulisse", in his *Fra le carte dei poeti* (Milan–Naples, Ricciardi, 1965), pp. 41–77.
- A. Pagliaro, *Ulisse: ricerche semantiche sulla "Divina commedia"*, 2 vols (Messina–Florence, D'Anna, 1966), I, 371–432.
- d'A. S. Avale, "L'ultimo viaggio di Ulisse" [1966], in his *Dal mito alla letteratura e ritorno* (Milan, Saggiatore, 1990), pp. 209–33.
- M. Fubini, *Il peccato di Ulisse e altri scritti danteschi* [1947, 1952] (Milan–Naples, Ricciardi, 1966).
- J. Freccero, "Dante's Ulysses: From Epic to Novel" [1966], in his *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 136–51.
- D. Thompson, "Dante's Ulysses and the Allegorical Journey" [1967], in his *Dante's Epic Journeys* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. 1–83.
- J. A. Scott, "L'Ulisse dantesco" [1971], in his *Dante magnanimo* (Florence, Olschki, 1977), pp. 117–93.
- A. A. Iannucci, "Il 'folle volo' di Ulisse: il peso della storia" [1976], in his *Forma ed evento nella "Divina commedia"* (Rome, Bulzoni, 1984), pp. 145–88.
- L. Pertile, "Dante e l'ingegno di Ulisse", *Stanford Italian Review*, 1 (1979), 35–65.
- J. M. Lotman, "Il viaggio di Ulisse nella *Divina commedia*", in his *Testo e contesto: semiotica dell'arte e della cultura* [Italian translation] (Bari, Laterza, 1980), pp. 81–102.
- J. Pépin, "The Platonic and Christian Ulysses", in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, edited by D. J. O'Meara (Norfolk, Va., International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1982), pp. 3–18.
- K. Stierle, "Odysseus and Eneas: eine typologische Konfiguration in Dantes *Divina commedia*", in *Das fremde Wort: Studien zur Interdependenz von Texten*, edited by I. Nolting-Hauff and J. Schulze (Amsterdam, Grüner, 1988), pp. 111–54.
- M. Corti, "Le metafore della navigazione, del volo e della lingua di fuoco nell'episodio di Ulisse", in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Aurelio Roncaglia a cinquant'anni dalla sua laurea*, 2 vols (Modena, Mucchi, 1989), II, 479–91.
- M. Pazzaglia, "Il canto di Ulisse e le sue fonti classiche e medievali", in his *L'armonia come fine: conferenze e studi danteschi* (Bologna, Zanichelli, 1989), pp. 97–133.
- M. Picone, "Dante, Ovidio e il mito di Ulisse", *Lettere italiane*, 43 (1991), 500–16.
- W. Stull and R. Hollander, "The Lucanian Source of Dante's Ulysses", *Studi danteschi*, 63 (1991), 3–52.
- P. Boitani, *L'ombra di Ulisse* (Bologna, Mulino, 1992), pp. 41–60.
- T. Barolini, "Dante's Ulysses: Narrative and Transgression", in *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by A. A. Iannucci (Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1997), pp. 113–32.
- G. Brugnoli, *Studi danteschi III: Dante filologo: l'esempio di Ulisse* (Pisa, ETS, 1998).

LYNNE PRESS

*Modes of Metamorphosis in the Comedia:
The Case of Inferno XIII*

At the end of the *Decameron*, in his “Conclusione dell’autore”, Boccaccio protests against critics’ cavils about the salacious content of some of his tales, arguing that the critics in question should have known what to expect because each story is prefaced by a synopsis: “Elle, per non ingannare alcuna persona, tutte nella fronte portan segnato quello che esse dentro dal loro seno nascoso tengono” [“So as not to mislead anyone, they all carry branded on their foreheads what they hold hidden within their bosoms”].¹ Dante did not focus our attention on the contents of each canto to that extent, but with the passage of time certain cantos have become identified with certain figures, so that *Inferno* X is Farinata’s canto, *Purgatorio* XVI Marco Lombardo’s, and so on. By the same token, *Inferno* XIII has frequently been described as the canto of Pier della Vigna, even though his three speeches amount to only 43 lines out of a total of 151. Other commentators have seen this canto as Virgil’s, because of the active role played by Dante’s guide at three important stages in the drama: it is Virgil who encourages Dante to break off a branch, Virgil who makes a fulsome apology to Pier for the damage caused and finally Virgil who must guess the object of Dante’s curiosity, overcome as he is by compassion, and ask Pier to tell them how the souls become imprisoned in the trees. Certainly, Virgil plays a pivotal role in this canto, in keeping with his function as guide and mentor. Just before entering

From *Dante and His Literary Precursors: Twelve Essays*, edited by John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie, pp. 201–20. Copyright © 2007 by UCD Foundation for Italian Studies.

the circle of the Violent, in Canto XI, he has explained the geography of Hell and its rationale, and it is clear that he knows the source of the groans that form an aural counterpart to the forest's gloomy appearance; he even (obliquely) reproaches Dante for not realizing what he might have understood "pur con la mia rima" ["in my verses"; line 48]. Who has invested such authority in Virgil?

Dante's choice of Virgil as escort has produced much debate and given rise to interpretations of Virgil as a symbol of human reason, as a synthesis of ancient civilization, or as the poet who celebrated the Roman Empire at its height. In the case of the first two options, it might be argued that Aristotle, whom Dante describes as "il maestro di color che sanno" ["the Master of those who know"; *Inferno*, IV. 131] and in *Convivio* "maestro e duca della ragione umana" ["the master and guide of human reason"], could have a greater claim.² But the greatest attraction to Virgil is arguably as poet of a united Italy. The connection between Dante's political and poetic ideals is intimated in the fourth book of *Convivio*, where he refers to Virgil as "lo maggiore nostro poeta" ["our greatest poet"],³ and also reiterates the need for a universal empire willed by God and entrusted to Rome.

The political aspect of Dante's allegiance to Virgil is not made explicit during their first encounter, when Virgil identifies himself first and foremost as the author of the *Aeneid*:

Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia,
poi che'l superbo Ilión fu combusto.
(*Inferno*, I. 73–5)

[I was a poet, and I sang of that just son of Anchises who came
from Troy after proud Ilium was burned.]

Before he answers Virgil's question, "Perché non sali il delitoso monte / che è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?" ["Why do you not climb the delectable mountain, the source and cause of every happiness?"; *Inferno*, I. 77–8], Dante's response is to acclaim Virgil's position as the light and honour of those who came after him, and at the same time to identify himself as part of that literary continuum. In the second canto, following the traditional invocation of the Muses, Dante (not for the last time) turns to Virgil for reassurance that he is capable of the undertaking, addressing him as "Poeta che mi guidi" ["Poet, you who guide me"; *Inferno*, II. 10]—in other words, insisting on his standing as a fellow creative artist, almost the embodiment of poetry, and certainly a central figure in the line

stretching from Homer to Dante. In a show of diffidence Dante objects that he is unworthy—"Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono" ["I am not Aeneas, I am not Paul"; *Inferno*, II. 32]—, and by this juxtaposition of Virgil's hero and St Paul implies that his poem will constitute a syncretism of Classical and Christian culture. This sentiment also echoes the remark of the Sibyl who accompanies Aeneas to Hades in Ovid's synopsis of the *Aeneid* in Books XIII and XIV of *Metamorphoses*, "Nec dea sum" ["I am no goddess"]⁴ in response to Aeneas's promise to raise a temple to her on his return. Here we have a subtle fusion of direct reference to Virgil's epic and to the Bible in terms that also recall Ovid's reworking of the Virgilian myth of Aeneas, and all this in a passage that purports to be modest—an impressive example of Dante's creative management of his sources. By placing himself in this literary continuum Dante also intimates his intention of measuring himself against his predecessors.

The extent to which Dante draws on Virgil's description of Hades in Book VI of the *Aeneid* is open to question. Certainly many of the mythological figures that occur in Dante's Hell, such as Cerberus, Charon, Minos, the Giants, the Harpies and the Furies, feature in Aeneas's journey to the Underworld, but Virgil's poem is not the only Classical text in which they occur.⁵ The choice of Virgil may well be linked to the extended account of the Underworld in his epic, but just as Virgil as mentor and guide is subject to certain limitations—within the Christian context of Dante's epic he cannot accompany Dante beyond Mount Purgatory—so the descent of Aeneas into Hades provides no more than a point of departure for Dante. Even when drawing on specific aspects of the Virgilian source Dante does not feel bound by strict fidelity, so that his Minos in *Inferno* V combines the attributes of Virgil's Minos in Book VI, whose role is "quaesitor" ["presiding"; line 432] and who as the chairman of the court hears the shades' confessions, and Rhadamanthus, a much fiercer figure situated in Tartarus, in the very depths of Hades, who compels the shades to bring to light crimes committed in life which the perpetrator vainly thought concealed. In Dante the two moments are telescoped, so that the sinners appear before Minos, make a free confession and are allotted their place in Hell at once: Christian justice in Dante is inexorable and immediate, while the process in Virgil is less explicit. In fact, the structure and moral order which characterize all three *cantiche* are absent from Virgil's account, in which the journey itself is less important than the encounter with Anchises, father of Aeneas.

Even when Dante draws closely on a Virgilian passage he generally adds something to enhance the meaning, as in the double simile used in the *Aeneid* to suggest the multitude of souls clamouring to board Charon's boat:

quam multa in silvis autumni frigore primo
 lapsa cadunt folia, aut ad terram gurgite ab alto
 quam multae glomerantur aves, ubi frigidus annus
 trans pontum fugat et terris immittit apricis.

(*Aeneid*, VI. 309–12)

[thick as the leaves of the forest that at autumns first frost dropping fall, and thick as the birds that from the seething deep flock shoreward, when the chill of the year drives them overseas and sends them into sunny lands.]

Here the effect of both similes is to stress the sheer number of the shades, but Virgil moves from the mention of the season in the first simile to the notion of migrating birds in the second, while Dante focuses on the first image of trees losing their leaves in autumn and derives greater poignancy from it by evoking a continuous shower of leaves, a process that ends with a sense almost of the tree's bereavement:

Come d'autunno si levan le foglie
 l'un' apresso de l'altra, fin che 'l ramo
 vede a la terra tutte le sue spoglie [. . .].

(*Inferno*, III. 112–14)

[As the leaves fall away in autumn, one after another, till the bough sees all its spoils upon the ground (. . .).]

Ruskin remarked of this image, "When Dante describes the spirits falling from the bank of Acheron as dead leaves from a bough, he gives the most perfect image possible of their utter lightness, feebleness, passiveness and scattering agony of despair."⁶ While the effect of Virgil's two similes is to stress the accumulation of shades on the bank, Dante turns his attention to the situation's relentlessness, initially in the image of Charon, who "batte col remo qualunque s'adagia" [is "beating with his oar whoever lingers"; *Inferno*, III. 111]. In the explication of the simile, however, Dante himself introduces a second image, which in fact recalls Virgil's mention of the migrating birds:

similmente il mal seme d'Adamo
 gittansi di quel lito ad una ad una,
 per cenni, come ucel per suo richiamo.

(*Inferno*, III. 115–17)

[so there the evil seed of Adam: one by one they cast themselves from that shore at signals, like a bird at its call.]

In Virgil the image replicates the image of the falling leaves, subject to the conditions of the season and the cycle of the year, while Dante moves from the sense of loss and waste—the tree gazing on the despoilment of its branches—to the irresistible nature of the call. He refers not, however, to the natural instinct of the birds to fly south, but to a moment in falconry which suggests years of practice and training.

If we are tempted to suppose that this is not a deliberately creative extension of Virgil's imagery but simply a piece of poetry poorly remembered, Dante makes it clear in *Inferno* XX that he is very familiar with the *Aeneid*, when he has Virgil say to him:

Euripilo ebbe nome, e così il canta
l'alta mia tragedía in alcun luoco:
ben lo sai tu, che la sai tutta quanta.
(*Inferno*, XX. 112–14)

[Eurypylos was his name, and thus my high Tragedy sings of him in a certain passage—as you know well, who know the whole of it.]

Two things should be noted from these lines: the explicit distinction between the categories of poetry in which the two poets were writing, and the fact that this assertion occurs just after Dante has contradicted Virgil's account of the founding of Mantua, earlier in the same canto.

In Virgil's poem the founding of his birthplace is mentioned almost in passing, in the review of Etruscan captains in Book X, where Ocnus, son of Manto, is accredited with the founding of Mantua:

Ille etiam patriis agmen ciet Ocnus ab oris,
fatidicae Mantus et Tusci filius amnis,
qui muros matrisque dedit tibi, Mantua, nomen.
(*Aeneid*, X. 198–200)

[Yonder, too, Ocnus summons a host from his native shores, son of prophetic Manto and the Tuscan river, who gave thee, O Mantua, ramparts and his mother's name.]

Not only does Dante draw on passages in Ovid and Statius, who says that Manto was unmarried—in line 82 Dante refers to her as “*verGINE CRUDA*”

["cruel virgin"]—:⁷ he states that the city was founded by others in the place where Manto died. He thereby severs any immediate connection with this clairvoyant daughter of Tiresias, and has Virgil end the digression with the injunction:

Però t'assenno che se tu mai odi
 originar la mia terra altrimenti,
 la verità nulla menzogna frodi.
 (*Inferno*, XX. 97–9)

[Therefore I charge you, if you ever hear other origin given to my city, let no falsehood defraud the truth.]

On one level, Virgil as human reason may be commenting on the absolute truth and autonomy of poetic creation and also the capacity of literature to misrepresent historical facts for literary effect; Moore suggests that Dante may have wished to correct Virgil's account on the strength of what later writers had said, but this is unconvincing;⁸ Whitfield suggests that it is an attempt by Dante to clear Virgil of any dubious connection with the magic arts, however remote.⁹ But it could equally well be an assertion of Dante's artistic autonomy—he, not Virgil, will decide on the origins of Mantua—and an attempt to define Dante's place in relation to Virgil, belonging to a later civilization that is also enlightened by Christianity.

The fact that Dante refers to the *Aeneid* as a "tragedía" places it, in terms of approach and style, in antithesis to his own work, the "comedia" (*Inferno*, XVI. 128 and XXI. 2). In *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante outlines the different styles proper to different poetic genres: for tragedy an exalted style is appropriate; for comedy a lowlier style; for elegy, the style of misery.¹⁰ While the tragic mode demands gravity of theme, sublimity of diction and excellence of language, the comic style is less consistent and may offer variety in each of these aspects. This definition posits Dante's poem as complementary to Virgil's, not as an attempt to rival Virgil in the same literary genre. By terming his own work a comedy Dante is not decrying its merit but simply underlining a shift in emphasis and, by inference, the greater scope and range of his work and the greater possibility for metamorphosis in all senses.

In his approach to Classical authors Dante is not notable for his modesty: while the protagonist of the *Comedia* frequently has occasion to turn to Virgil, as "dolce maestro" or "buon duca", for assistance with the recalcitrant denizens of Hell, Dante the poet has every confidence in his literary genius, as is evident in the encounter with the "bella scola" (*Inferno*, IV. 94) of

Homer in Limbo. On a narrative level, Dante becomes the successor of Virgil, who is welcomed on his return to Limbo in the words, “Onorate l’altissimo poeta” [“Honour the great poet”; *Inferno*, IV. 80]. Virgil not only identifies the group of poets as Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucan, but comments on their greeting:

Però che ciascun meco si convene
nel nome che sonò la voce sola,
fannomi onore, e di ciò fanno bene.
(*Inferno*, IV. 91–3)

[Since each shares with me the name the single voice has uttered,
they do me honour, and in that they do well.]

These lines suggest not only the common pursuit of poetry but the mutual dependence of Classical authors on common sources. Dante subsequently describes how the poets assemble, confer and welcome him.¹¹ He repeats the word “onore”, thus linking his admittance to this eminent circle with the welcome that has just been accorded to Virgil:

e più d’onore ancor assai mi fenno,
ch’esser mi fecer de la loro ischiera,
sí ch’io fui sesto tra cotanto senno.
(*Inferno*, IV. 100–2)

[and far more honour still they showed me, for they made me one
of their company, so that I was sixth amid so much wisdom.]

The implications of this configuration are multiple: Dante honours the Classical authors by study and *imitatio* of their style; thus he aligns himself with authors of antiquity, but at the same time, as the author of a clearly Christian text, creates a link between them and Christian culture and, in measuring himself against them and counting himself worthy of their company, asserts his standing as an heir of the Classical tradition.

While there is no direct challenge to Virgil in the *Comedia*, Dante has fewer inhibitions about comparing his art explicitly to that of Virgil’s successors, Ovid and Lucan, in Canto XXV of *Inferno*, which describes the thieves, whose punishment is to undergo constant transformation by being merged with the bodies of monsters. While Dante the pilgrim watches the double metamorphosis with horror, Dante the poet takes delight in his literary expertise and apostrophizes first Lucan, then Ovid:

Taccia Lucano omai là dov'è tocca
del misero Sabello e di Nasidio,
e attenda ad udir quel ch'or si scocca.

Taccia di Cadmo e d'Aretusa Ovidio;
ché se quello in serpente e quella in fonte
converte poetando, i' non l'invidio;
ché due nature mai a fronte a fronte
non trasmutò sí ch'ambedue le forme
a cambiar lor materie fosser pronte.

(*Inferno*, XXV. 94–102)

[Let Lucan now be silent, where he tells of the wretched Sabellus and of Nasidius, and let him wait to hear what now comes forth. Concerning Cadmus and Arethusa let Ovid be silent, for if he, poetizing, converts the one into a serpent and the other into a fountain, I envy him not; for two natures front to front he never so transmuted that both forms were prompt to exchange their substance.]

Dante's boast is that his imagination not only matches but surpasses that of Ovid and Lucan, as the transformation he describes is double, not single; in Lucan's *Pharsalia* Sabellus's body is liquefied and melts away (which recalls the fate of Vanni Fucci in the previous canto) and Nasidius explodes into shapeless matter.¹² Meanwhile the reference to Ovid involves two separate stories, those of Cadmus and of Arethusa.¹³ As Moore remarks, however, Dante's transformation scene has many striking points of resemblance with a quite different episode in Ovid, the account of the formation of the Hermaphrodite (*Metamorphoses*, IV. 285–388), which was in fact a composite of two natures.¹⁴ Earlier in the canto (*Inferno*, XXV. 58–60) Dante has reworked the image of ivy twining tightly around a tree that Ovid uses in his Hermaphrodite narrative (line 365); and in lines 69 ("Vedi che già non sè né due né uno" ["Lo, you are already neither two nor one!"]) and 77–8 ("Due e nessun l'immagine perversa/parea" ["The perverse image seemed both and neither"]) he echoes the comment at the end of Ovid's account:

nec duo sunt et forma duplex, nec femina dici
nec puer ut possint, neutrumque et utrumque videntur.
(*Metamorphoses*, IV. 378–9)

[no longer two, but a single form, possessed of a dual nature, which could not be called male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither.]

It is interesting that such literary pilfering should occur in a canto which deals with the fate of those who stole in this life.

Having noted how Dante can mislead the reader in his allusions to his sources, let us return to Canto XIII and trace how he manipulates and metamorphoses sources and other material to create an ultimately self-referential piece.

The wood of the suicides is the central area of the Circle of the Violent, an anulus on the edge of the abyss between the tombs of the heretics and the monster Gerione, poised to plunge the two poets to the lowest part of Hell, where the sins of fraud are punished. The souls in the upper circles are recognizably human and punished by the elements of air, water and earth; only when we enter the City of Dis do we encounter the element of fire as a mode of punishment. In addition, throughout this circle there are hybrid mythological figures, the Minotaur, the Centaurs and the Harpies. Their polymorphic aspects serve to underline the alteration in human nature that the will to violence produces. The punishment of the tyrants, plunged into the river of boiling blood, and the rain of fire which burns the blasphemers, sodomites and usurers on the barren sand are in dramatic counterpoise to the eerie stillness of the wood of the suicides.

What prompted Dante to use the image of the tree which contains each of the souls? Most commentators see a reference to the *Aeneid* in Virgil's words to the wounded tree:

“S’egli avesse potuto saper prima”
rispose il savio mio, “anima lesa,
ciò ch’è veduto pur con la mia rima,
non averebbe in te la man distesa.”
(*Inferno*, XIII. 46–9)

[“If he, O wounded spirit, had been able to believe before,” replied my sage, “what he had never seen save in my verses, he would not have stretched forth his hand against you.”]

But the episode of Polydorus in *Aeneid* III is of a different order. Certainly, blood oozes from the myrtle bush plucked by Aeneas, but Polydorus is an innocent victim of Polymnestor's greed, and the voice comes from the tomb, not the bush itself. Metamorphoses into trees are much more frequent in Ovid, but also much more specific: Daphne becomes a laurel tree, Hyacinthus and Narcissus become particular flowers, not just a vegetable form. There are also several episodes in Ovid in which blood flows from a broken or damaged branch, as in the transformation of the sisters of Phaeton, the

sacrilege of Erysichthon or the incident involving Dryope.¹⁵ In Ovid, however, metamorphosis is not usually linked to any moral judgement on the character in question; it is frequently an act of divine mercy or apotheosis, as in the case of Baucis and Philemon, who are spared from the flood and transformed simultaneously into two intertwining trees.¹⁶

There is a further Ovidian link in the simile which occurs immediately after Pier's first speech:

Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia
da l'un d'i capi, che da l'altro geme
e cigola per vento che va via [. . .].
(*Inferno*, XIII. 40–2)

[As from a green brand that is burning at one end, and drips from the other, hissing with the escaping air (. . .).]

The image of the log groaning when thrown on the fire is probably taken from Ovid's account of the death of Meleager.¹⁷ At his birth, it had been foretold that Meleager would have the same lifespan as a log of wood, which his mother, Althea, initially saved from the flames but later is compelled to cast on the fire after her son has killed her brothers. Ovid writes:

Aut dedit aut visus gemitus est ipse dedisse
stipes, ut invitis conreptus ab ignibus arsit.
(*Metamorphoses*, VIII. 513–14)¹⁸

[The very wood groaned, or seemed to groan, as it was kindled and set alight by the unwilling fire.]

In Virgil's poem the Polydorus episode occurs during Aeneas's wanderings when he is about to offer a sacrifice on the spot where he intends to establish his city. As he tries to gather myrtle branches for the altar, blood oozes in dark drops at each of his three attempts, and finally the voice of Polydorus issues from the tomb. Polydorus was the youngest son of Priam, King of Troy, and had been sent to his brother-in-law, Polymnestor, King of Thrace, at the outbreak of the Trojan War, together with the greater part of Priam's treasure, but was killed by Polymnestor after Priam's death. The function of the voice from the tomb is to warn Aeneas and his companions not to settle in a land where the laws of hospitality have been so violently contravened. There is no exchange between Aeneas and Polydorus: the message is delivered, proper burial rites are observed and the company sets sail.

The case of Polydorus is markedly singular: the thicket of cornelian trees and spiky myrtle stems stands out from the surrounding countryside, while in Dante's version the great thorn bush that he approaches is but one of many such, and the poets are surrounded by a trackless wood of hideously distorted trees. There is no sense of ominous foreboding before Aeneas attempts to break a branch, whereas Dante prepares us from the outset of the canto for something horrible and unnatural, as the description of the "dolorosa selva" ["woeful wood"; *Inferno*, XIV. 10] contradicts all our preconceptions regarding trees and woods:

Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco;
non rami schietti, ma nodosi e involti;
non pomi v'eran, ma stecchi con tòsco.
(*Inferno*, XIII. 4–6)

[No green leaves, but of dusky hue; no smooth boughs, but gnarled and warped; no fruits were there, but thorns with poison.]

The simile which follows suggests that the wildness of this forest goes far beyond anything in nature, even the most uncultivated areas:

Non àn sì aspri sterpi né sí folti
quelle fiere selvagge che'n odio ànno
tra Cecina e Corneto i luoghi cólti.
(*Inferno*, XIII. 7–9)

[Those wild beasts that hate tilled lands between Cecina and Corneto do not have thickets so rough or dense.]

This is no *locus amoenus* of courtly poetry; indeed, rather than birdsong, all that can be heard is the strange plaintive laments of the Harpies, the wood's only visible inhabitants. They are yet another borrowing from Virgil, also from the third book of the *Aeneid*, where it is one of their company who instructs Aeneas to set sail for Italy.¹⁹ The wood, then, has become a kind of *Urwald*, the ancient forest as an archetypal symbol of lack of civilization, a place beset with dangers and trials. Even though Dante is warned by Virgil that the things he will see in this *girone* will seem incredible, Dante's reaction to this caveat and to the groaning is to stand stock still, "tutto smarito" ["all bewildered"; line 24]. It is as if this canto holds in embryo the changing nature of Dante's experience of sin throughout *Inferno*. The situation at the outset of Canto XIII takes us back to the very first canto, where Dante was likewise in a dark wood, so much so

that “la diritta via era smarita” [“the straight way was lost”; *Infèrno*, I. 3]; in a sense, the situation is worse still in this wood, as there is no trace of any path whatsoever. The keynote of fear which permeates the first canto is also present in Dante’s response to the words of protest uttered by the broken bush: “lasciai la cima / cadere, e stetti come l’om che teme” [“I let fall the tip, and stood like one who is afraid”; lines 44–5]. After the intervention of Virgil and the explanation by Pier della Vigna Dante’s emotions undergo a further change, from fear to compassion. A full catharsis has taken place, from his initial sense of bewilderment to a state of mind which is not only understanding of, but also pity for, the predicament of the tree-enclosed soul.

The pity felt by Dante is also in response to Pier della Vigna’s initial cry of protest, when he reproaches Dante for the vandalism of his actions, which harms more than a tree. Similarly, when the voice of Polydorus issues from the tomb in Virgil’s poem, there is an appeal for understanding rather than compassion, based on their common origin, as he points out that he is no foreigner but Trojan-born. Polydorus’s main concern, however, is not for himself but to warn Aeneas and his companions not to settle in that harsh land. The impact of Pier della Vigna’s words is rather different, as all his concern is directed towards himself and his words are a strange petition indeed in Hell: “non à tu spirito di pietate alcuno?” [“Have you no spirit of pity?”; line 36]. Since Pier has been divested of all outward traces of humanity, his reprimand to Dante is rather illogical, and there is already a trace of the “desdegnoso gusto” [“scornful temper”; line 70] which led to his death as he turns the tables by asking if there is no humanity in Dante and protests on behalf of his new community, the wood of the suicides:

Òmini fummo; or siam fatti sterpi:
ben dovrebbe esser la tua man più pia,
se stati fossimo anime di serpi.
(*Infèrno*, XIII. 37–9)

[We were men, and now are turned to stocks. Truly your hand ought to be more merciful had we been souls of serpents.]

There is again a curious echo of Canto I, where Dante first encountered Virgil in the dark wood and asked him to have pity on him:

“Miserere di me” gridai a lui,
“qual che tu sie, o ombra o omo certo!”
Risposemi: “Non omo, omo già fui.
(*Infèrno*, I. 65–7)

[I cried to him, “Have pity on me whatever you are, shade or living man!” “No, not a living man, though once I was,” he answered me.]

There is a certain complicity between Virgil and Pier, reflected in the way that each responds to the language of the other, possibly stemming from a shared awareness of the persuasive force of language and its capacity to alter reality. Virgil’s intervention on Dante’s behalf is polished and courteous; he implies that his own stance is sympathetic in the description of Dante’s action as “opra ch’a me stesso pesa” [“a deed that grieves me”; line 51] and invites and anticipates Pier’s depiction of himself as an innocent victim by the method he adopts on other occasions to induce the souls to share their stories—pointing out that Dante is not an inhabitant of Hell and could make amends by restoring their reputation on his return. The only other occasion when Virgil shows anything like compassion is when he is about to enter his own area, Limbo, and explains his pallor to Dante:

L’angoscia delle genti
che son qua giù, nel viso mi dipinge
quella pietà che tu per tema senti.
(*Inferno*, IV. 19–21)

[The anguish of the people here below paints my face with the pity
that you take for fear.]

At this juncture Virgil’s emotion is a very human attribute, but it also has an element of self-pity, since it is primarily directed towards those souls who share his own fate. A similar inference, however, may be drawn from those occasions when Dante is moved to pity in his journey through Hell, namely that he is drawn to a particular aspect of the situation of those souls with which he identifies. It may be simply the common love of Florence, as in the case of Ciaccio, to whom Dante says, “Il tuo affanno / mi pesa sí, ch’a lagrimar m’invita” [“Your misery so weighs upon me that it bids me weep”; *Inferno*, VI. 58–9], and likewise of the three sodomites from noble Guelf families to whom Dante admits, “Non despetto, ma doglia / la vostra condizion dentro mi fisse” [“Not contempt, but sorrow, your condition fixed within me”; *Inferno*, XVI. 52–3]. A different order of sympathy is called into action with Francesca, who is not from Tuscany but whose words cause Dante to faint with emotion, phrased as they are in the stock terms of the *dolce stil nuovo*.

As regards Pier della Vigna, the impact and rhetorical eloquence of his speech recall both Francesca and Ulysses, in that the grim realities of the

actual sin do not figure largely in their accounts. Francesca invokes all the fine sentiments of *amor courtois*, distracting Dante and the reader from the act of adultery itself and misrepresenting her desire for her brother-in-law as an emotion that is both noble and ennobling—"Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'aprende" ["Love, which is quickly kindled in a gentle heart"; *Inferno*, V. 100]. In similar vein, it is all too easy to overlook the fact that Ulysses is being punished as a counsellor of fraud as he relates the stirring speech to his companions which persuaded them to set sail with him one last time:

Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza.
(*Inferno*, XXVI. 119–20)

[You were not made to live as brutes, but to pursue virtue and knowledge.]

While Francesca's story is constructed around a refrain that begins with "Amor" and Ulysses speaks in a linear narrative that builds up to a climax with the sudden whirlwind stirring up the waves which engulf his ship, Pier's words are as convoluted, gnarled and intricate as the wood itself. In each case, however, the sinner is intent on bringing about what amounts to a metamorphosis of their actions before Dante. Pier draws on all his experience as a wordsmith in the literary and diplomatic spheres and exploits all the resources of language, poetic and rhetorical, to relate the end of his life in terms that distance us from the act of suicide, yet are framed in such a way as to elicit compassion, which was what he demanded in his first words to Dante.

In everything he says Pier is characterized by a self-regarding introversion that would explain his ultimate reaction to disgrace. There is an implicit compliment to Virgil's mastery of language in Pier's opening remarks, coupled with a recognition of the element of danger posed by such self-revelation, suggested by the verbs "adeschi" and "inveschi":

Sí col dolce dir m'adeschi,
ch'io non posso tacere; e voi non gravi
perch' io un poco a ragionar m'inveschi.
(*Inferno*, XIII. 55–7)

[You so allure me with your sweet words that I cannot keep silent;
and may it not burden you that I am enticed to talk a little.]

This is a distinct change of tone from his first outraged protest, but is also in keeping with his need to portray himself as a victim and hence elicit compassion. Pier begins his narrative at the time when he was at the height of his power as the most trusted counsellor of Frederick II, then swiftly juxtaposes this with the outcome of his devotion. His sense of injustice, which runs throughout the account, comes across above all in his taste for the paradoxical statement, as in the lines:

Fede portai al ghiorioso offizio,
tanto ch'io ne perdeai li sonni e i polsi
(*Inferno*, XIII. 62–3)

[So faithful was I to the glorious office that for it I lost both sleep
and life]

—lines in which the grandiloquent language referring to his position is counterbalanced by the physicality of the expression that records his death (“polsi” = “wrists”, “pulses”). Pier’s speech is highly charged and condensed, but neatly avoids expressing culpability. The machinations of envy in the court setting are represented as an inevitable occupational hazard in the phrase “morte e comune” (line 66), which again reminds us of his death. There is a dramatic change of tone after the contorted *terzina* in which he actually broaches the subject of his suicide:

L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,
credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,
ingiusto fece me contra me giusto.
(*Inferno*, XIII. 70–2)

[My mind, in scornful temper, thinking by dying to escape from
scorn, made me unjust against my just self.]

The inwardly swirling pattern of rhyme and repetition in that declaration is very different from the clear, uncluttered syntax of his protestation that he was not guilty of treachery:

Per le nove radici d'esto legno
vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede
al mio signor, che fu d'onor sí degno.
(*Inferno*, XIII. 73–5)

[By the new roots of this tree I swear to you that I never broke faith with my lord, who was so worthy of honour.]

The one constant element in Pier's brief outline of his fall from favour is his fidelity to his office. The word "fede" features twice, at the outset and at the end of the speech, and "fede" and "onor" are the only words to be repeated in the twenty-four lines, apart from those instances in which reiteration is deliberately used to produce verbal pyrotechnics, as in the lines with "infiammò [. . .] 'nfiammati [. . .] infiamâr" (67–8). Whatever else has changed—public opinion and even the favour of the Emperor himself—, Pier has not altered his attitude to the position he held. At least, this is how he presents the situation to Virgil and Dante, with the intention of persuading the pilgrim to return and refute what he claims to be the false accusations that he had to escape from. Of course, the very nature of his punishment, as a suicide and not as one who betrayed his master, is a clear indication of what Dante thought about the matter.

Like the other souls in Hell, Pier has not altered his outlook despite his alteration in form. He is still concerned with the opinion of others and constantly averts our gaze from the act which placed him in Hell, the act of suicide. The tone and tenor of his language change again when he describes how the souls come to be imprisoned in the trees, as he adopts a much more factual and dispassionate manner, without indulging in word games and displays of eloquence. His account ends with the fate of the wretched bodies that were rejected by the suicides, which they will have to drag back and hang each on its own tree, an eternal reminder of their sin and an evocative image of the suicide of Judas.

After the brief but animated interlude of the demonic hunt of the squanderers, the canto ends with an episode that offers a further contrast to Pier's main speech, in the exchange with the unidentified Florentine suicide, who is described not as a "gran pruno" ["great thornbush"; line 32] but as a "cespuglio" ["bush"; line 131]. The one strange request that this soul makes is that the foliage torn off him in the scramble that has just taken place be gathered together at the foot of the shrub, as if, all too late, he has come to value his new mode of existence. This suicide simply names his native city as Florence, though he displays a similar, but less intense, penchant for periphrasis and allusive language to that of Pier della Vigna. In contrast to Pier, however, this soul offers a stark statement of his suicide, with no attempt to offer any excuse for that act of desperation: "Io fei gibetto a me de le mie case" ["I made me a gibbet of my own house"; *Inferno*, XIII. 151].

This closing line puts a new perspective on the eloquent verbal camouflage of Pier della Vigna and brings us back to the realities of the sin punished

here. With the wood of the suicides Dante has created a powerful and evocative image which has literary echoes that go far beyond Virgil's Polydorus. Nor did the transformation of Classical sources end with Dante, as the episode in *Inferno* XIII found particular favour with Renaissance poets and was re-worked to great effect by both Ariosto and Tasso,²⁰ each in his own characteristic fashion, just as Dante extended the parameters of the original with an interweaving of sources and an enrichment of psychological resonance to create his own splendid metamorphosis.

NOTES

1. G. Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone*, edited by C. Segre (Milan, Mursia, 1977), p. 675; G. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, translated by C. Ó Cuilleaináin (Ware, Wordsworth, 2004), p. 765.

2. *Conv.*, IV. 6. 8, 14–15: “E a vedere come Aristotile è maestro e duca della ragione umana, in quanto intende alla sua finale operazione, si conviene sapere che questo nostro fine, che ciascuno disia naturalmente, antichissimamente fu per li savi cercato. [...] E questi furono Academici chiamati, sí come fue Platone e Speusippo suo nepote: chiamati per lo luogo cosí dove Platone studiava, cioè Academia; né da Socrate presero vocabulo, però che nella sua filosofia nulla fu affermato. Veramente Aristotile, che Stagirite ebbe soprannome, e Zenocrate Calcedonio, suo compagnone, per lo ’ngegno singulare e quasi divino che la natura in Aristotile messo avea, questo fine conoscendo per lo modo socratico quasi e academico, limaro e a perfezione la filosofia morale redussero, e massimamente Aristotile.”

3. *Conv.*, IV. 26. 7–8: “Lo freno usa quando elli caccia, e chiamasi quello freno Temperanza, la quale mostra lo termine infino al quale è da cacciare; lo sprone usa quando fugge, per lui tornare allo loco onde fuggire vuole, e questo sprone si chiama Fortezza o vero Magnanimitate, la quale vertute mostra lo loco dove è da fermarsi e da pungare. E cosí infrenato mostra Virgilio, lo maggiore nostro poeta, che fosse Enea, nella parte dello Eneida ove questa etade si figura: la qual parte comprende lo quarto, lo quinto e lo sesto libro dello Eneida.”

4. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIV. 130; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by M. M. Innes [1955] (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970), p. 314. All translations from Ovid in this essay are from the same version.

5. J. Lemprière, *A Classical Dictionary* (London, Cadell, 1839) lists the following analogues. Cerberus: Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, I. 5; *De Natura Deorum*, III. 17; Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 622; Pausanias, II. 25,31; Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 312; Tibullus, *Elegies*, I, 10, 35. Charon: Seneca, *Hercules Furens*, III. 765. Furies: Aeschylus, *Eumenides*; Sophocles, *Oedipus Coloneus*; Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 185; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IV; Seneca, *Hercules Furens*, 87; *Medea*, 13; Cicero, *In Pisonem*, 20; *De Natura Deorum*, III. 18; Suetonius, *Vita Neronis*, 34; Horace, *Odes*, 2. 13. Giants: Apollodorus, I. 6; Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 150, 185; Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, I. 20; Horace, *Odes*, 3; Pausanias, VIII. 2; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I. 151; *Tristia*, IV, elegies 7, 17, *Fasti*, V. 35; Homer, *Odyssey*, VI, X. Harpies: Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 265.

6. Quoted by E. Moore, *Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante* = his *Studies in Dante: First Series* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 24. (One might wonder whether or not Ruskin also had in mind the first three lines of Shelley's “Ode to the

West Wind": "O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being, / Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead/Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing [. . .]". Moore also remarks, "A comparison of the corresponding passages in Virgil and Dante will show how little Dante owed to Virgil" (p. 24).

7. E. Moore, *Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante*, pp. 174–5, refers to Statius, *Thebaid*, IV. 463 and Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI. 157.

8. "Possibly Dante may have wished to correct Virgil's account on the strength of his other authorities, Statius and Ovid" (E. Moore, *Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante*, p. 175). This is no more than a very tentative hypothesis, as Moore states earlier: "Dante intentionally here corrects the Virgilian legend. Why he did so, or what other authority he was following, I am unable to say" (p. 174).

9. J. H. Whitfield, *Dante and Virgil* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1949), pp. 68–9.

10. *DVE*, II. 4. 5–6: "Deinde in hiis que dicenda occurrunt debemus discretionem potiri, utrum tragice, sive comice, sive elegiace sint canenda. Per tragediam superiorem stilum inducimus, per comediam inferiorem, per elegiam stilum intelligimus miserorum. Si tragice canenda videntur, tunc assumendum est vulgare illustre, et per consequens cantionem ligare. Si vero comice, tunc quandoque mediocre quandoque humile vulgare sumatur [. . .]. Si autem elegiace, solum humile oportet nos sumere."

11. In *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, II. 6.7, having given examples of the "illustrious vernacular", Dante advocates the study of those poets who observe the rules of grammatical construction, with particular mention of Virgil, Ovid, Statius and Lucan: "Et fortassis utilissimum foret ad illam habituandam regulatos vidisse poetas, Virgilium videlicet, Ovidium Metamorphoseos, Statium atque Lucanum, nec non alios qui usi sunt altissimas prosas, ut Titum Livium, Plinium, Frontinum, Paulum Orosium, et multos alios quos amica sollicitudo nos visitare invitat."

12. The gruesomely spectacular accounts of the deaths of Sabellus and Nasidius occur in a catalogue of disasters which befell Cato's men in Libya, in *Pharsalia*, IX. 761–804.

13. The episode of the transformation of Cadmus into a snake occurs in *Metamorphoses*, IV. 564–603, while Arethusa's metamorphosis into a spring is narrated in *Metamorphoses*, V. 572–641.

14. E. Moore, *Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante*, p. 213.

15. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II. 340–66, VIII. 738–84, IX. 334–93.

16. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII. 711–24.

17. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VIII. 451–525.

18. The only other occasion on which Dante uses the rather unusual lexeme *stizzo* in the *Comedia* is when Virgil reminds the protagonist of Meleager's fate in answer to Dante's enquiry as to how the gluttons can be wasted by fasting if they have no bodies: "Se t'amentassi come Meleagro / si consumò al consumar d'un stizzo, / non fora' disse'a te questo sí agro" (*Purgatorio*, XXV. 22–4).

19. *Aen.*, III. 245–57.

20. Vegetal victims are found in *Orlando furioso* and *Gerusalemme liberata* in incidents that have echoes of Dante and Virgil. Ariosto evinces bathos and humour in the encounter between Ruggiero and Astolfo, transformed into a myrtle by the enchantress Alcina in *Orlando furioso*, VI. 26–33. Like Polydorus in the *Aeneid*, Astolfo intends to give a warning, about the deceptions of Alcina, but, unlike Aeneas, Ruggiero soon forgets the warning, or rather, rationalizes it in terms of the Renaissance notion that appearances mirror inner qualities. Astolfo is not a tragic

hero but one waylaid by passion, and is subsequently restored to human form by Melissa. In many ways Astolfo forms a counterpoint to Ruggiero, whose path of enlightenment still stretches before him, whereas Astolfo is instrumental in recovering Orlando's senses from the moon and returning them to their rightful owner. Tasso's epic has two parallel episodes: that of Tancredi in the enchanted forest, dismayed by the blood from the bark and the voice of Clorinda issuing from a cypress (*Gerusalemme liberata*, XIII. 37–46), as he is still distracted from his duty by his love for the dead Clorinda; and that of Rinaldo facing a similar trial in XVIII. 25–38, where Armida appears from a myrtle tree, but no blood is shed, as the phantom becomes a multi-armed giant threatening his resolve, which has been bolstered by his confession on the Mount of Olives and the indication of God's forgiveness in the fall of dew that has imbued his clothes with "un lucido candore" (XVII. 16). Tasso's tones are sombre and foreboding, dwelling on the conflict between duty and love; he is always mindful of the moral lesson to be gleaned.

Chronology

- | | |
|----------|---|
| ca. 1265 | Dante Alighieri is born in Florence, probably May 29. |
| 1274 | Meets Beatrice, believed to be the daughter of Folco Portinari. |
| 1277 | Becomes engaged to Gemmadi Manetto Donati. |
| 1283 | Father dies. Shortly after, Dante marries Gemma Donati, with whom he has four children (Jacopo, Pietro, Giovanni, and Antonia). |
| 1289 | Participates in the Battle of Campaldino; The Guelf League (Florence and Lucca) defeats the Ghibellines of Arezzo. |
| 1290 | Death of Beatrice. Dante serves in the war between Florence and Pisa. |
| ca. 1293 | Writes <i>Vita Nuova</i> ; begins study of philosophy. |
| 1294 | Meets Charles Martel, King of Hungary and heir to the kingdom of Naples and the country of Provence. |
| 1295 | Enrolls in a guild and enters public life. |
| 1300 | Becomes prior for bimester (one of the six highest magistrates in Florence)—June 15 to August 15. |
| 1301 | Opposes extension of troops consignment to Boniface VIII in July. In October, sent with two other emissaries to the Pope in Rome. |
| 1302 | Florence is taken over by the once exiled Black Guelphs. Dante ordered to appear to answer charges and is banished from the |

- city for two years. Later his banishment becomes perpetual and he is sentenced to death.
- ca. 1304–1307 Writes *De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Convivio*.
- ca. 1306 Probably the year in which Dante begins working on the *Comedy*.
- ca. 1310 Writes *De monarchia*.
- 1314 *Inferno* completed.
- 1315 Rejects the possibility of a pardon and settles in Verona with Can Grande della Scala. Composes the *Questio de acquset terra*.
- ca. 1319 Moves to Ravenna with Guido Novella da Plenta. Completes *Purgatorio* and part of *Paradiso*.
- 1321 Dies in Ravenna, during the night of September 13 to 14.

Contributors

HAROLD BLOOM is Sterling Professor of the Humanities at Yale University. Educated at Cornell and Yale universities, he is the author of more than 30 books, including *Shelley's Mythmaking* (1959), *The Visionary Company* (1961), *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963), *Yeats* (1970), *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), *Agon: Toward a Theory of Revisionism* (1982), *The American Religion* (1992), *The Western Canon* (1994), *Omens of Millennium: The Gnosis of Angels, Dreams, and Resurrection* (1996), *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998), *How to Read and Why* (2000), *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (2002), *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (2003), *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* (2004), and *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (2005). In addition, he is the author of hundreds of articles, reviews, and editorial introductions. In 1999, Professor Bloom received the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Gold Medal for Criticism. He has also received the International Prize of Catalonia, the Alfonso Reyes Prize of Mexico, and the Hans Christian Andersen Bicentennial Prize of Denmark.

TEODOLINDA BAROLINI is director of graduate studies and a professor of Italian at Columbia University, where she has also been chair of the department. From 1997 to 2003, she served as president of the Dante Society of America. Among other works, she has published *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* and coedited *Dante for the New Millennium*.

MARC COGAN is an emeritus professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. He is the author of *The Human Thing: The Speeches and Principles of Thucydides' History*.

R.W.B. LEWIS was a professor at Yale University. He served a number of times as director of graduate studies in American studies and also chaired the department. He is the author of *Dante: A Life* as well as of other titles. He was given the award for lifetime achievement as a biographer by the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

LLOYD HOWARD teaches in the department of Hispanic and Italian studies at the University of Victoria. As an administrator, he has served eleven years as chairman of the department and also has held other posts. He published *Virgil the Blind Guide: Marking the Way Through the Divine Comedy*.

LINO PERTILE is a professor at Harvard University, where he also is the director of graduate studies in Italian. He is the author of *La puttana e il gigante: Dal canti code I cantici al Paradiso terrestredi Dante* and coeditor of *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*.

GIUSEPPE MAZZOTTA is a professor in the Italian department at Yale University, where he also is the director of graduate studies. His books include *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* and *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*. He also published the Norton edition of Dante's *Inferno*.

JOHN A. SCOTT is an emeritus professor and honorary senior research fellow in European languages and studies at the University of Western Australia. He is the author of *A World of Darkness and Disorder in Purgatorio* and *Dante's Political Purgatory*.

MICHELANGELO PICONE has been a professor of romance philology at the University of Zurich. He has written and/or edited work, in various language editions, on the novel and other topics.

LYNNE PRESS is a former head of the department of Italian studies at the Queen's University, Belfast. She coauthored *Women and Feminine Images in Giacomo Leopardi, 1798–1837: Bicentenary Essays*.

Bibliography

- Acquaviva, Paolo, and Jennifer Petrie, ed. *Dante and the Church: Literary and Historical Essays*. Dublin, Ireland; Portland, Ore.: Four Courts, 2007.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Dante, Poet of the Secular World*. New York: New York Review Books, 2007.
- Balsamo, Gian. *Rituals of Literature: Joyce, Dante, Aquinas, and the Tradition of Christian Epics*. Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press; Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 2004.
- Barnes, John C., and Jennifer Petrie, ed. *Dante and His Literary Precursors: Twelve Essays*. Dublin, Ireland; Portland, Ore.: Four Courts, 2007.
- Barnes, John C., and Jennifer Petrie, ed. *Word and Drama in Dante: Essays on the Divina Commedia*. Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1993.
- Barolini, Teodolinda. *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2006.
- Beckett, Lucy. *In the Light of Christ: Writings in the Western Tradition*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006.
- Bigongiari, Dino; edited by Anne Paolucci. *Readings in The Divine Comedy*. Dover, Del.: Griffon, for Bagehot Council, 2006.
- Braida, Antonella, and Luisa Calè, ed. *Dante on View: The Reception of Dante in the Visual and Performing Arts*. Aldershot, England: Continuum, 2007.
- Cachey, Theodore, J., Jr., ed. *Dante Now: Current Trends in Dante Studies*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.
- Cirigliano, Marc, ed. and trans. *The Complete Lyric Poems of Dante Alighieri*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.
- Conn, Jan. *What Dante Did with Loss*. Montreal, Quebec: Signal Editions, 1994.

- Cornish, Alison. *Reading Dante's Stars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Dronke, Peter. *Dante's Second Love: The Originality and the Contexts of the Convivio*. Exeter: Society for Italian Studies, 1997.
- . *Verse with Prose from Petronius to Dante: The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Franke, William. *Dante's Interpretive Journey*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- . *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Fraser, Jennifer Margaret. *Rite of Passage in the Narratives of Dante and Joyce*. Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2002.
- Gallagher, Joseph. *To Hell & Back with Dante: A Modern Reader's Guide to The Divine Comedy*. Liguori, Mo.: Triumph Books, 1996.
- Gibbons, David. *Metaphor in Dante*. Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre, 2002.
- Ginsberg, Warren. *Dante's Aesthetics of Being*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Gragnotati, Manuele. *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.
- Hawkins, Peter S. *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Hollander, Robert. *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Holloway, Julia Bolton. *Twice-Told Tales: Brunetto Latino and Dante Alighieri*. New York: P. Lang, 1993.
- Howard, Lloyd. *Formulas of Repetition in Dante's Commedia: Signposted Journeys Across Textual Space*. Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.
- Kay, Richard. *Dante's Christian Astrology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- Kleiner, John. *Mismapping the Underworld: Daring and Error in Dante's Comedy*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Malato, Enrico. *Dante*. Roma: Salerno, 1999.
- Mazzocco, Angelo. *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists: Studies of Language and Intellectual History in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Italy*. Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1993.
- Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- McInerny, Ralph. *Dante and the Blessed Virgin*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010.

- McLain, Carin. "Screening the Past: Shifting Desire in the *Vita Nuova*." *Italian Culture* 26 (2008): 1–20.
- McMahon, Robert. *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, and Dante*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006.
- Miller, James, ed. *Dante & the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005.
- Oeisner, Hermann. *The Influence of Dante on Modern Thought: Being the Le Bas Prize Essay, 1894*. London, T. F. Unwin, 1895.
- Paolucci, Anne. *Dante Revisited: Essays*. Middle Village, N.Y.: Griffon House Publications, 2008.
- Paolucci, Anne, ed. *Dante: Beyond the Commedia*. New York: Griffon House Publications for the Bagehot Council, 2004.
- Parker, Deborah. *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Payton, Rodney J. *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's Inferno*. New York: P. Lang, 1992.
- Quinones, Ricardo J. *Foundation Sacrifice in Dante's Commedia*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.
- Raffa, Guy P. *The Complete Danteworlds: A Reader's Guide to the Divine Comedy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Royal, Robert. *Dante Alighieri: Divine Comedy, Divine Spirituality*. New York: Crossroad, 1999.
- Scott, John A. *Dante's Political Purgatory*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
- Tambling, Jeremy, ed. *Dante*. London: Longman, 1999.
- Taylor, Charles H., and Patricia Finley. *Images of the Journey in Dante's Divine Comedy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Watt, Mary Alexander. *The Cross That Dante Bears: Pilgrimage, Crusade, and the Cruciform Church in the Divine Comedy*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005.
- Wetherbee, Winthrop. *The Ancient Flame: Dante and the Poets*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.
- Wilson, Robert. *Prophecies and Prophecy in Dante's Commedia*. Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 2008.

Acknowledgments

Teodolinda Barolini, "Purgatory as Paradigm: Traveling the New and Never-Before-Traveled Path of This Life/Poem." From *The Undivine Comedy*. Copyright © 1992 Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

Marc Cogan, "Part I: The Order of the *Paradiso*." From *The Design in the Wax: The Structure of the Divine Comedy and Its Meaning*. Copyright © 1999 by University of Notre Dame Press.

R.W.B. Lewis, "Dante's Beatrice and the New Life of Poetry." From *New England Review* vol. 22, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 69–80. Copyright © 2001 by R.W.B. Lewis.

Lloyd Howard, "The Destination: Dante's Eyes Fixed and Attentive." From *Formulas of Repetition in Dante's Commedia: Signposted Journeys Across Textual Space*. Copyright © 2001 and reprinted by permission of McGill-Queen's University Press.

Pertile, Lino, "Does the *Stilnovo* Go to Heaven?" From *Dante for the New Millennium*, edited by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey. Copyright © 2003 Fordham University Press.

Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The Heaven of the Sun: Dante Between Aquinas and Bonaventure." From *Dante for the New Millennium*, edited by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey. Copyright © 2003 Fordham University Press.

John A. Scott, "Dante's Other World: Moral Order." From *Understanding Dante*. Copyright © 2004 by University of Notre Dame.

Michelangelo Picone, "The Classical Context of the Ulysses Canto." From *Patterns in Dante: Nine Literary Essays*, edited by Cormac Ó Cuilleánáin and Jennifer Petrie. Copyright © Foundation for Italian Studies, UCD, National University of Ireland, Dublin, 2005.

Lynne Press, "Modes of Metamorphosis in the *Comedia*: The Case of *Inferno* XIII." From *Patterns in Dante: Nine Literary Essays*, edited by Cormac Ó Cuilleánáin and Jennifer Petrie. Copyright © Foundation for Italian Studies, UCD, National University of Ireland, Dublin, 2007.

Every effort has been made to contact the owners of copyrighted material and secure copyright permission. Articles appearing in this volume generally appear much as they did in their original publication with few or no editorial changes. In some cases, foreign language text has been removed from the original essay. Those interested in locating the original source will find the information cited above.

Index

Characters in literary works are indexed by first name (if any), followed by the name of the work in parentheses

- Adam (*The Divine Comedy*), 35, 159
 Aeneas, 167, 188, 206
Aeneid (Virgil)
 influence on Dante, 42, 154, 164,
 184, 186, 198–202, 205–210
 Aesop fables, 84
 Alighieri, Giovanni (son), 86
 Alighiero I, 84
 “Analysis Terminable and
 Interminable” (Freud), 19
 Anderson, William, 95
Apologia pauperum (Bonaventure),
 134
 Aquinas, Thomas, 3, 68, 140, 150,
 154, 161
 Contra impugnantes Dei cultum,
 134
 De unitate intellectus contra
 Averroistas, 135
 On the Divine Names, 141
 Super Boetium de Trinitate, 144
 Arius, 144
 Aristotle, 11, 62
 Ethics, 149–150, 168
 Physics, 146
 views, 134–135, 137, 151, 154–
 156, 167
 Auden, W.H., 13
 Auerbach, Eric
 on *The Divine Comedy*, 11–13,
 15–16
 Augustine, St. of Hippo, 168
 Confessions, 26
 De Trinitate, 140
 influence of, 3, 5, 24, 27, 29–31,
 33
Banquet, The. See Convivio (The
Banquet)
 Bardi, Contessina de, 87
 Bardi, Simone de, 87
 Barolini, Teodolinda, 219
 on *The Divine Comedy*, 21–52
 Beatrice (*The Divine Comedy*), 16
 Christlike figure, 4–5, 7, 13–14
 and desire, 29–30
 final parting with, 18–19
 guide, 53, 55–57, 125
 Lady Nine, 18
 origins, 7
 in Paradise, 24, 59–63, 67–69,
 74–76, 114, 118, 123, 128–
 130, 132, 159–161, 164–166
 in Purgatory, 97–98, 104–109,
 111–114, 116–117, 130
 rebuke, 25–26

- and salvation, 17
- scolding, 10, 96, 116–117
- vision of, 9, 60–61
- Beatrice (*Vita Nuova*), 5
 - Dante's love for in, 3–4, 30, 83, 85–90, 95–96, 98, 101, 110–111, 113–114, 125
 - forgetting, 128–129
 - in Heaven, 90, 93–94, 107, 109, 113
- Berti, Bellincione, 84
- Blake, William, 4
 - "Milton," 13
- Bloom, Harold, 219
 - introduction, 1–19
- Boccaccio, Giovanni, 1
 - Decameron*, 197
- Boethius, 84
 - De Trinitate*, 140
- Bonaventure, 136, 142
 - Apologia pauperum*, 134
 - Collationes in Hexameron*, 135, 137, 140, 143
 - De reductione artium ad theologiam*, 135
 - Legenda*, 142
- Borges, Jorge Luis, 3, 6, 16, 129
- Borgo San Donnino, Gerardo da, 134
- British
 - romanticism, 10
- Burgess, Anthony
 - Nothing Like the Sun*, 1
- Byron, Lord, 10
- Cacciaguida degli Elisei, 84
- Campaldino battlefield, 92
- Canterbury Tales, The* (Chaucer)
 - Pardoner in, 1
 - Wife of Bath in, 1
- Caprona siege, 92
- Catholicism
 - Dante's influence on, 2–3, 17
- Cavalcanti, Cavalcante dei, 104–105, 128, 142, 150, 161
- Cavalcanti, Guido, 4, 6, 85, 91, 94, 105
- Cervantes, Miguel de, 2
 - masters of mimesis, 11
- Cervigni, Dino, 90
- Chalcidius, 135
- Changing Light at Sandover, The* (Merrill), 13
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, 2, 12
 - The Canterbury Tales*, 1
 - The Man of Law's Tale*, 151
 - masters of mimesis, 11
- Christian, 99
 - code of behavior, 151, 153–155, 162–164, 186
 - desire, 191
 - mathesis, 134–135
 - philosophy, 17, 168–169, 180, 199, 202–203
 - virtue of humility, 157–158, 191
 - wisdom, 133
- Cicero, 151
- Clareno, Angelo, 136
- Cogan, Marc, 153, 155, 166, 219
 - on the order of *Paradiso*, 53–82
- Collationes in Hexameron* (Bonaventure), 135, 137, 140, 143
- Confessions* (Augustine), 26
- Contra impugnantes Dei cultum* (Aquinas), 134
- Convivio (The Banquet)*, 2, 38, 40, 164
 - celestial bodies in, 74
 - desire in, 22–23, 31–34
 - Lady Philosophy in, 31, 100–102, 104, 106–107, 109
 - life as a voyage in, 22–23, 25–27, 34, 165, 188
 - perfect age of 81 in, 17–18
 - political ideals in, 198
 - treachery in, 151
- Curtis, Ernst Robert, 3, 17
- Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Mazzotta), 134, 136, 146
- Davis, Charles T., 133

- Decameron* (Boccaccio), 197
De divinis nominibus (pseudo-Dionysius), 140–141
De reductione artium ad theologiam (Bonaventure), 135
De Trinitate (Augustine), 140
De Trinitate (Boethius), 140
De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas (Aquinas), 135
De vulgari eloquentia, 177, 202
 Nimrod in, 38–39
 Tuscan poets in, 39
Divine Comedy, The, 6
 characters in, 4–5, 7, 9–10, 13–19, 24–31, 33, 35–36, 38–44, 53–76, 83–84, 91–92, 96–102, 105–109, 111–114, 116–119, 123–133, 135–138, 141–147, 149–152, 154–156, 159–170, 177–193, 197–213
 desire in, 23, 27–34
 evaluations of sins in, 166–170
 fate in, 11, 15
 heroism in, 5
 journey in, 2, 21, 31, 34–36, 104, 106–107, 112, 118–119, 129, 136, 166, 190
 light metaphysics in, 160
 narrative, 21–22, 27, 43, 53, 99, 160, 162, 169, 177, 185–186, 189, 203–204
 portrayal of love in, 123–132
 salvation, 105, 117, 119
 suffering in, 27
 tragic death in, 11, 27
 translations of, 7–8
 Trinitarian pattern in, 134–135, 138–140, 148, 162–163
 the truth in, 3, 17, 37, 43, 55–56, 129
 vision in, 11
 war memories in, 92
 writing of, 2
 Donati, Gemma (wife)
 marriage, 84–87
 Donati, Manetto, 84
 Eliot, T.S., 7
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 14
 Eriugena, Scotus, 141
Ethics (Aristotle), 149–150, 168
Evangelium Aeternum (Joachim of Flora), 133–134
 Eve (*The Divine Comedy*), 35, 38, 159
 gluttony, 29, 31
 tree of knowledge, 28–29
 Fergusson, Francis, 94
 Freccero, John, 11, 16, 18
 “Manfred’s Wounds and the Poetics of the *Purgatorio*,” 13
 Freud, Sigmund, 15
 “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” 19
 mystics, 6
 Gianni, Lapo, 91
 Gilson, Étienne, 141
 Goethe, 2
 Guillaume de Saint Amour, 134
 Guinicelli, Guido, 17, 91–92, 101
Hamlet (Shakespeare), 6
 Hamlet in, 1, 4, 7, 12, 15
 Horatio in, 5
 Laertes in, 5
 Ophelia in, 5
 Hazlitt, William, 10–11
 Hebrew Bible, 12
Henry V (Shakespeare)
 Falstaff in, 1, 12
 Hollander, Robert, 102
 Homer, 6, 167, 177, 199, 203
 Iliad, 184
 masters of mimesis, 11
 Odyssey, 184
 Howard, Lloyd, 220
 on Dante’s eyes in *The Divine Comedy*, 97–122

Hugo, Victor, 2

Iliad (Homer), 184

Inferno in *The Divine Comedy*, 1, 6,

15, 98, 102, 146, 162

apocalyptic mission, 18

Averroës in, 167–168

Avicenna in, 167–168

barrators in, 153

beginning of, 104–105

Bertran de Born in, 156

Briareus in, 159

Brunoetto Latini in, 84, 91

circles of Hell in, 57, 100–101,

105, 117, 124, 150–151, 167,

169, 177–179, 182–183, 198–

199, 202, 205, 209

contrapasso in, 156–158

desire in, 124

false prophets of, 39

Farinata in, 197

Fraud in, 157

Iacopo Rusticucci in, 169

incidents of, 56

love in, 123–124, 180

Lucia in, 114, 131, 178

lupa of, 33

moral order of, 149–153

Nicholas Orsini in, 157

perfected voyages in, 21, 35–36,

103–104

permanent notoriety of, 7

Priscian in, 83

punishments in, 72, 158–159

recoil from, 7

Rock of Faith in, 157, 159

simoniac popes in, 157

siren songs in, 105

spirit of the Old Testament in,
24

Tegghiaio Aldobrandi in, 169

Ulysses in, 106–107

Virgin Mary in, 114

writing of, 2, 131

Italian language, 2

Joachim of Flora, 135, 137

Evangelium Aeternum, 133–134

John of Parma, 136

Joyce, James, 1

Judaism, 17

Kafka, Franz, 17

King Lear (Shakespeare), 1, 6

Lear in, 7

Latini, Brunetto, 4, 84

Legenda (Bonaventure), 142

Lewis, R.W.B., 220

on Dante's Beatrice in *Vita*

Nuova, 83–96

Lucca, Bonagiunta, 90

Macbeth (Shakespeare), 6

Magus, Simon, 3, 153, 157

“Manfred's Wounds and the Poetics
of the *Purgatorio*” (Freccero), 13

Man of Law's Tale, *The* (Chaucer),
151

Marlowe, Christopher, 4

Mazzotta, Giuseppe, 1, 220

on Aquinas and Bonaventure in

Paradiso, 133–147

Dante's Vision and the Circle of

Knowledge, 134, 136, 146

Meccan Revelations (Sufi Ibn Arabi),
7

Medici, Cosimo de, 87

Merrill, James

The Changing Light at Sandover,
13

Merwin, W.S., 7–8, 10

Metamorphoses (Ovid)

influence of, 178, 180–181, 183–

184, 186–189, 191, 199, 201,

203–204, 206

Meun, Jean de, 134

“Milton” (Blake), 13

Milton, John, 6, 17

blindness, 14

- masters of mimesis, 11
 moral order, 149–176
New Life, The. See Vita Nuova (The New Life)
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 14, 17
Nothing Like the Sun (Burgess), 1
Odyssey (Homer), 184
 Ovid
 Metamorphoses, 178, 180–181, 183–184, 186–189, 191, 199, 201, 203–204, 206
Paradiso in *The Divine Comedy*, 1, 15, 18, 108, 119, 146, 168
 Adam in, 59
 Albert the Great in, 135
 allegorical, 53, 55–56, 73
 Anselm in, 135
 Bede in, 135
 blessed souls in, 53–55, 57–64, 66–68, 70–73, 75–76, 118, 124, 128, 130, 135, 139, 162, 166
 Boethius in, 135
 Cacciaguida in, 126, 132, 163
 Charles Martel in, 64–66, 68–70, 73, 124, 150, 161
 Chrysostom in, 135
 Cunizza in, 71, 73, 124, 161
 Dionysius the Areopagite in, 135, 141
 divine justice in, 62, 76, 166
 Donatus in, 135
 Folquet of Marseilles in, 71, 124, 161
 Forese Donati in, 65
 Gratian in, 135
 incidents of, 56
 Isidore of Seville in, 135
 Joachim of Flora in, 136, 138, 144, 162
 Justinian in, 54–55, 58, 61, 73, 162
 King Constantine in, 66
 King David in, 66
 King Hezekiah in, 66
 love in, 123–129, 132, 163–164
 Manfred in, 160
 mendacious preachers of, 39, 43
 moral order of, 159–166
 Nathan the prophet in, 135
 nontransgressive transgression in, 38
 order of, 53–82
 Orosius in, 135
 perfected voyages in, 21, 41, 55
 Peter Damian in, 39–41, 59, 165–166
 Peter Lombard in, 135
 Peter of Spain in, 135
 Piccarda Donati in, 58, 65–67, 125, 160, 162
 Rabanus Maurus in, 135
 Rahab in, 124–125, 161
 reflection in, 55
 rewards in Heaven in, 64, 66, 77
 Richard of Saint Victor in, 135
 Ripheus in, 66, 164
 Saint Augustine in, 141, 166
 Saint Benedict in, 55, 164–166
 Saint Bonaventure in, 133, 135–136, 138, 141, 143–144, 148, 162
 Saint Dominic in, 133, 141, 143–144, 146, 148, 162
 Saint Francis in, 133, 141–144, 146, 148, 162, 166
 saints old and new in, 23, 55, 192
 Saint Thomas Aquinas in, 133, 135–136, 141, 144–147, 162, 166
 Siger of Brabant in, 135–136, 138, 144, 146, 168
 Solomon in, 60–61, 63, 76, 135, 144, 162–164
 star's influence in, 68–69, 71, 74–75, 77, 141

- structure of, 56–57
- Trajan in, 66, 164
- truth in, 53, 55–56
- Virgin Mary in, 59, 114, 117, 131, 166
- William the Good in, 66
- writing of, 2
- Pertile, Lino, 220
 - on the portrayal of love in *The Divine Comedy*, 123–132
- Petrarch
 - Secretum*, 24–25
 - Physics* (Aristotle), 146
- Picone, Michelangelo, 220
 - on the classical context of *Ulysses* canto, 177–196
- Plato, 2, 67, 167
 - philosophy, 134, 140
- Plotinus, 137, 140
- Portinari, Beatrice
 - death, 2–3, 5, 30, 89, 95, 97, 100–102, 107, 109, 113, 117
 - incarnation of, 4
 - influence on Dante, 3–4
 - love for, 83–89
 - marriage, 87
 - mockery, 3
 - personal myth of, 3–4, 18
 - praise of, 7
- Portinari, Folco, 92–93
- Press, Lynne, 220
 - on Virgil's influence on Dante, 197–215
- Protestant Bible, 2
- Proust, Marcel
 - masters of mimesis, 11
- pseudo-Dionysius
 - De divinis nominibus*, 140–141
- Purgatorio* in *The Divine Comedy*, 1, 6, 15, 146, 162
 - Belacqua in, 156
 - Bonconte da Montefeltro in, 37, 64–65, 72
 - Casella episode in, 24–25, 30, 97, 99–102, 104–107, 109, 112
 - Cato's rebuke in, 24, 97, 102–103, 106–107, 114–116
 - confessions in, 107, 158
 - contrapasso in, 158–159
 - Dante's eyes in, 97–122
 - desire for knowledge in, 23–24, 28, 31, 33, 36, 135
 - dreams in, 105–106, 130
 - dwellers in, 5
 - earthly paradise in, 8
 - eloquence of, 7, 24
 - ending of, 18, 25, 29, 102–103
 - Femmina Balba in, 105–107
 - Francesca in, 123, 125, 168, 180, 209–210
 - free will in, 154
 - gironi of, 57
 - Guido Guinizelli in, 91–92, 105, 123
 - heretics in, 155–156
 - human limitation theme in, 37
 - incidents of, 56
 - Joachim da Fiore in, 65
 - language of, 25, 38
 - love in, 123–125, 127, 130, 132, 154–155
 - Lucia in, 123, 130–131
 - Manfred in, 155
 - Marco Lombardo in, 69, 197
 - Marie de Brabant in, 42, 65
 - Matilda in, 8–10, 25, 107
 - memories in, 108, 114, 189
 - moral order of, 153–156, 158
 - Nella Donati in, 127
 - Nino Visconti in, 44
 - Omberto Aldobrandesco in, 158
 - order of, 64–65, 69–70
 - pride in, 158
 - rebirth theme in, 104
 - restless heart in, 24
 - Saint Bernard in, 98, 114–115, 117–118, 129–132
 - Saint Francis of Assisi in, 127
 - siren songs in, 105, 107–109, 112, 115

- souls in, 153–154, 158, 191–192
 - suffering in, 27, 156, 158
 - temptation in, 101, 108, 114
 - three theological virtues in, 97, 106, 108–109, 114
 - transgressions in, 43–44, 64, 153, 155–156, 158, 168
 - unmaking of memory in, 24
 - Virgin Mary in, 98, 114–118, 126, 129–130, 158
 - voyaging in time in, 21, 25–26, 31, 35–36, 41, 98, 104
 - writing of, 2, 131
- Pythagoras, 135

- Racine, Jean, 2
- Rossetti, Dante Gabriel
 - “To the Dim Light,” 7

- Sabellius, 144
- Salimbene, 136
- Santayana, George, 2
- Scott, John A., 220
 - on Dante’s moral order, 149–176
- Secretum* (Petrarch), 24–25
- Shakespeare, William
 - characters, 1–2, 5, 12
 - death, 2
 - detachment, 3–4
 - Hamlet*, 1, 4–6, 12, 15
 - Henry V*, 1
 - King Lear*, 1, 6
 - language, 1–2
 - Macbeth*, 6
 - masters of mimesis, 11
 - The Winter’s Tale*, 9–10
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe
 - memory, 9–10
 - translations of *The Divine Comedy*, 8
- Siger of Brabant
 - principle of wisdom, 135–137
- Singleton, Charles S.
 - on *The Divine Comedy*, 11, 13–14
 - translations, 138–139, 142, 145

- Socrates, 2, 137
- Solomon
 - Book of Wisdom, 137
- Sordello (*The Divine Comedy*), 42
 - guide, 43, 161
- Stevens, Wallace, 13, 15
- Super Boetium de Trinitate* (Aquinas), 144

- Thurber, James, 16
- “To the Dim Light” (Rossetti), 7
- Tolstoy, Leo, 6
 - masters of mimesis, 11
- Tyndale, William, 2

- Ulysses (*The Divine Comedy*), 39
 - classical context of, 177–196
 - coupling of, 33
 - evocation of, 27, 30–31, 38
 - gluttony, 29, 107
 - knowledge, 191
 - lack of measure, 32
 - last voyage, 177, 182–184, 186–193, 209–210
 - mariner, 35–36, 102–106, 141
 - pride, 104–105
 - reverberation, 37
 - special stature of, 21
 - transgressions, 28–29, 31, 36, 106, 116, 180–181

- Valois, Charles de, 152
- Vico, Giambattista, 6
- Virgil, 84, 168, 178
 - Aeneid*, 42, 154, 164, 184, 186, 198–202, 205–210
 - influence on Dante, 197–215
- Virgil (*The Divine Comedy*), 4, 13, 17
 - guide, 57, 91, 97–98, 102, 105–106, 125, 129–132, 149–151, 154, 167–170, 179, 182–183, 185, 197–199
 - natural light, 14
 - on human intellect, 36
 - personification of Reason, 16

- poetic father, 19, 42
- Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*), 1
 - characters in, 3–5, 30, 83–90, 98, 100–101, 105–107, 109–113
 - childhood in, 83, 87
 - death theme in, 93–94
 - Dante's eyes in, 110, 113–114, 116
 - Donna Gentile in, 95–96, 98, 100–101, 105–107, 109–113
 - dream in, 85
 - grief and guilt in, 109–111, 115, 128–129
 - language, 90, 94–95
 - love for Beatrice in, 3–4, 83, 85–90, 95–96, 101, 110–111, 125
 - narrative, 89
 - new life in, 29–31
 - power of love in, 83, 85–87, 89, 93
 - screen-lady in, 86–87
 - sonnets in, 85–89, 94–96, 101, 110, 113
 - visions of love in, 86–87
- Whitman, Walt, 14, 92
- Winter's Tale, The* (Shakespeare), 9–10
- Wordsworth, William, 16
- Yahwist
 - masters of mimesis, 11
- Yeats, William Butler, 16